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## Contents

Authors	Articles	Page
<i>Mubarak Ademola Noibi:</i>	An Islamic Strategy for the Empowerment of Muslim Women in Nigeria.	1-14
<i>Ucheawaji G. Josiah:</i>	An Exegetical Exploration of Hosea 4:1-3.	15-32
<i>Omotade Adegbindin:</i>	Ogun and Yoruba Indigenous Knowledge.	33-48
<i>Adebola B. Ekanola and Francis Offor:</i>	The Quest for Social Development and the Denigration of the Humanities in Nigeria's Education System.	49-66
<i>Goke A. Akinboye:</i>	Sex-Work, Sex-Workers: Socio-Economic Considerations in the Practice of Prostitution in Ancient Greece.	67-86
<i>Mepaiyeda, Solomon Makanjuola:</i>	Emerging Trends in Fostering the Concept of Community among the Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria.	87-102
<i>Oke Olusegun Peter:</i>	Ethics in the Nigerian National Pledge and its Implications for the Transformation Agenda	103-116
<i>Olúwadọrọ, Jacob Olúdáre:</i>	Nativisation of Arabic Names: The Yoruba Language as a Case Study.	117-132
<i>Israel Olofinjana:</i>	Reverse Missions: The Emergence of African Churches in Britain.	133-154

<i>Authors</i>	<i>Articles</i>	<i>Page</i>
	<i>Mala Simon Babs: Challenges of Youth's Involvement in Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria and Programme for Christian Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA).</i>	155-176
	<i>Olubayo, Obijole: Demon Exorcism in the Gospels and in the Yoruba Comparative Context.</i>	177-194
	<i>Loveday Chigozie Onyazonwu: Interpreting Ethics of Generosity and its Practice as Waste Minimisation Strategy: A Case Study of Port Harcourt Metropolis.</i>	195-204
	<i>Honore Sewakpo: The Relevance of Ruth and Naomi's Relationship in Ruth 1:16-17 to Daughter-in-law and Mother-in-law Relationship in Nigeria.</i>	205-222
	<i>Victor Selorme Gedzi: Gospel Values and African Traditional Religion.</i>	223-244
	<i>Rev. Ezekiel A. Ajani: Pentecostal Movements and the Reshaping of Christianity in Africa.</i>	245-270
	<i>Harry Agbanu: Determinism, Human Freedom and the Mafi-Ewe Indigenous Culture: An Antithesis or a Harmony?</i>	271-288
	<i>Tolulope Olawunmi Idowu: On the Wings of Tradition: Evaluating the Marriage of Mythology, Religion and the Potential of the Contemporary Woman.</i>	289-310
	<i>Rev'd. Dr. Nathan Iddrisu Samwini: The Dynamics of Muslim Potential Involvement in Ghana from 1959 and Matters Arising.</i>	311-332
	<i>Emmanuel FolorunsoTaiwo: Orality in Roman and Yoruba Moralizing Poetry.</i>	333-348

# Emerging Trends in Fostering the Concept of Community among the Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria

*Mepaiyeda, Solomon Makanjuola*

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## Abstract

The establishment of the Pentecostal churches in Nigeria poses many challenges to the Mainline or established Churches such as the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist and Baptist churches, to mention just a few. One of such challenges is the prevalence of the “attitude of belonging” among the Pentecostal movements. In dealing with one another, members of the latter discretely demonstrate unique concern in fulfilling the biblical injunction to be “their brother’s keepers,” a rediscovery of one of the practices in the early church, where communalism was *modus operandi*.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, this paper aims at exploring this emerging trend in fostering communal life or belongingness in the churches of our study, a reminiscence of communal living in the early church. The paper is not aimed at asserting the total absence of such gesture in the mainline churches, but the dimension of the practice among the Pentecostals which inculcates a sense of belonging in their members, is the concern of this research. In addition, the paper also harped on the fact that, although the concept of belonging is the underlying factor responsible for an astronomical expansion among the Pentecostals today, the factor of communalism generates a negative tendency of exclusion of non-members of the community in the distribution of helpline.

Thus, the paper adopts a historical research method as well as fieldwork through oral interviews, library and archival materials.

## Introduction

From the general definition, Pentecostalism is a movement that attempts “to recapture the ardour of primitive Christianity, believing that the chosen people in the historic Christian churches have become

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1. The Holy Bible, Acts 4 v 32–35.

the frozen people of God.”<sup>2</sup> It is the most significant religious movement of the 20th century<sup>3</sup>, growing three times faster than Protestants; as a whole, particularly in Africa and also in Latin America where it is the largest denomination<sup>4</sup>

Pentecostalism, according to Dunn<sup>5</sup>, Ayeboyin and Isola<sup>6</sup>, Fatokun<sup>7</sup> as well as Budgen<sup>8</sup>, belongs to that stream within Christianity which places emphasis on receiving of certain gifts of the Spirit such as speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*), prophesying and healing as a sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostalism, which has been considered a movement to Christian renewal, stresses the importance of personal religious experience of the Holy Spirit rather than theology.

Dunn corroborated this statement when he asserted:

In contrast, the Catholic (Church) has normally tended to channel the Spirit through bishop and sacrament, and the protestant through the Bible<sup>9</sup>

The Pentecostal meetings or fellowships are characterised by outbursts of ecstatic enthusiasm featuring, healing, speaking in tongues and meteoric movements. Barratt<sup>10</sup> described it as chaotic meeting, given the fact that, apart from the description above, other features include shouting, crying, dancing, leaping, and, more importantly, speaking in tongues often simultaneously, tongues which usually no one understood and which mostly were not interpreted. This seems contrary to Paul’s teaching in 1 Cor 12 where he emphasised prophecy which edifies the church rather than *glossolalia*, which is self-edifying.

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2. J.O. Akaro, 1991, “The Twentieth Century Pentecostal Influence on Worship in the Mainline Churches of Nigeria”, *Ogbomosho Journal of Theology*, No. 6, Dec. 1991, p. 30.
  3. J. Schwarz, 1995, *Word Alive: An Introduction to the Christian Faith*, Minneapolis: tabgha Foundation, p.161.
  4. J. Schwarz, 1995, *Word Alive: An Introduction to the Christian Faith*, p.161.
  5. James Dunn, 1977, *Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Movement, A lion Handbook of History of Christianity*, Oxford: Lion Publishing Plc, p. 646.
  6. Deji Ayeboyin and Ademola Ishola, 1997, *African Indigenous Churches: An Historical Perspectives*, Lagos: Greater Height Publications, pp 16 & 17.
  7. S. A. Fatokun, 2007, “The Founder of Global Pentecostalism, Parham or Seymour? A Historical Evaluation”, *ORITA, Ibadan, Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. XXXIX 2nd Dec, 2007 p 31.
  8. Victor Budgen, 1985, *The Charismatic and the Word of God*, England: Evangelical press, page 184.
  9. James Dunn, 1977, *Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Movement, A lion Handbook of History of Christianity*, p. 646.
  10. Barrat in V. Budgen, p. 186

### Origin of Pentecostalism

Although most scholars hold the view that global Pentecostalism originated at the turn of the 20th century in America, the issue of foundership of this movement has become a controversy. Walter Hollenweger, the erudite scholar on the concept, pitched his tent with others like Richardson who favoured William Seymour<sup>11</sup>, the black Holiness preacher. But the works of Jonathan Hill<sup>12</sup> and Schwarz pointed to the fact that Seymour's preaching on Pentecostalism did not emerge in a vacuum. It was attributed to Charles Parham, an holiness Methodist preacher. Furthermore, the Bible School ran by the latter in Topeka, Kansas emphasised a second baptism in the Holy Spirit and that speaking in tongues was the Bible evidence of this baptism. This position, according to Hill, had a great influence on William Seymour, one of the students of the school who began his Pentecostal ministry in 1906 at 312 Azusa Street in Los Angeles<sup>13</sup>.

In the midst of these arguments, Fatokun seemed to have taken a middle stance by stating that;

Charles Parham can be appropriately considered as the founder of Pentecostalism while Seymour could only be accepted as just its catalyst or first evangelist. Parham was the great teacher and theologian of Pentecostalism while Seymour could be credited as its preacher and evangelist<sup>14</sup>.

He concluded by giving the illustration, that Parham laid the foundational doctrine of Pentecostalism giving it its five-fold emphasis of conversion, sanctification, divine healing, Spirit baptism with evidence of speaking in tongues and premilleniarism, while Seymour heralded it – giving it both national and international popularity.<sup>15</sup>

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11. S. A. Fatokun, 2007; "The Founder of Global Pentecostalism, Parham or Seymour? A Historical Evaluation", *ORITA, Ibadan, Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. XXXIX 2nd Dec, 2007 p. 32.
  12. Jonathan Hill, 2007, *The New Lion Handbook – The History of Christianity*, Oxford: Lion Hudson Plc, p.452.
  13. Jonathan Hill, 2007, *The New Lion Handbook – The History of Christianity*, p. 452.
  14. S. A. Fatokun, 2007, "The Founder of Global Pentecostalism, Parham or Seymour? A Historical Evaluation", *ORITA, Ibadan, Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. XXXIX 2nd Dec, 2007 p. 39.
  15. See S. A. Fatokun, p. 40.

Be that as it may, at this juncture, the historical setting of the phenomenon of Pentecostalism in the second and third centuries A.D. would be probed into.

### Historical Antecedents

Our focus in this aspect of the research is to trace the phenomenon to the pneumatic and apocalyptic movement known as Montanism.<sup>16</sup> The fact remains that the charismatic approach that gained prominence among the contemporary Pentecostal movements was noticed in Montanism, a Christian movement in Asia Minor in the second and third centuries. Mountanus, the man after whom the movement was named, was a converted pagan Phrygian priest whose teaching bordered on the arrival of the age of the Holy Spirit (*paraclete*). Therefore he stressed the ideas of new prophecy and possession of recognizable spiritual gifts, while his prophetesses, Maximilla and Priscilla were said to have fallen into ecstasy. Montanism practised among others, constant fasting, abstinence from sin, and complete separation from the world.<sup>17</sup> These became the basic tenets of older or classical Pentecostals which include the Church of God in Christ, the Assemblies of God<sup>18</sup> and The Apostolic Faith Church<sup>19</sup>.

Although Montanism was one of the movements declared as heretic by the Catholic Church due to abuse of spiritual gifts, it was for many Christians a symbol of return to the strictness of the early Christian community, a movement to Christian renewal. Furthermore, the era of pietism – an important movement in Europe in the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries seemed to have a significant influence on the great awakening that produced Pentecostals of the Eighteenth century.<sup>20</sup>

The Moravians' teachings popularized by Christian David and Zinzendorf<sup>21</sup> emphasized on living a Christ-life and playing down the importance of doctrine. Johann Amdt, described as the godfather of

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16. H. Boer, 1976, *A Short History of the Early Church*, Ibadan: Daystar Press, p. 63.

17. H. Boer, 1976, *A Short History of the Early Church*, p. 63.

18. Jonathan Hill, 2007, *The New Lion Handbook – The History of Christianity*, p. 452.

19. See S. A. Fatokun, p. 38.

20. Jonathan Hill, 2007, *The New Lion Handbook – The History of Christianity*, p. 452.

21. See Jonathan Hill, p. 327.



pietism, insisted that Christianity is not really about doctrinal rifts but about a personal encounter with Christ that results in individual salvation. Therefore, the community founded by the Pietists known as Hermhut (The Lord's Protection) was based upon a shared experience of the power of God, and self – surrender to the will of God.<sup>22</sup>

Concluding this historical survey, it must be noted that most scholars regard Pentecostalism as emerging from the Holiness Movement of the latter half of the nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> Advocates of that revivalist movement followed John Wesley's teachings of conversion and sanctification. The only divergence noticeable between the holiness movement and the Pentecostals was that the former did not stress the concept of baptism in the Holy Spirit evident by speaking in tongues as emphasized by Seymour.<sup>24</sup>

### **Typology of Pentecostals in Nigeria**

Strictly speaking, in discussing the history and types of Pentecostalism in Nigeria, one can not ignore the heterogeneity of the movement. Their study reveals doctrinal differences and varying degrees of denominational affiliation.

Gifford traced the difference to social or political context in which they operated. However Pentecostalism in Nigeria could be traced to the indigenous spiritual or charismatic movement of the twentieth century. Fatokun discussed the movement under four categories.

The first was the prophetic – healing revivalist movement championed by Garrick Sokari Braide, an Anglican member from the Niger Delta area in 1915, the second, a prayer movement (known as precious stone society or Diamond society) which took its source from St Saviour's Anglican Church, Ijebu-Ode in 1918 under the leadership of the church's sexton, Daddy Alli and later J.B. Shadare (the People Warden); the third, through the Cherubim and Seraphim Society, founded in 1925 by an itinerant evangelist, Moses Orimolade, and the last group which originated in 1930 at Ogere-Remo through the

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22. See Jonathan Hill, p.327.

23. W.H Gentz (Ed), 1986, *The Dictionary of Bible and Religion*, USA: Parthenon Press, p. 797.

24. W.J Hollenweger, 1972, *The Pentecostal*, Britain: SCM Press Ltd, p.22.

charismatic activities of Josiah Oshitelu whose possession of prophetic and visionary acumen influenced the birth of the Church of the Lord Aladura<sup>26</sup>

In addition to these, mention was made of indigenous Pentecostal revival movement in eastern Nigeria, typified by the Qua Iboe missionary, Rev J. W. Westgarth and "the Messifident Holy Church" among the Ibibios and the Efik people<sup>27</sup>; and of course, the Redeemed Christian Church of God that started in South Western Nigeria.

Apart from the indigenous Pentecostal movements discussed above, Nigeria witnessed the infiltration of Classical Pentecostal church movements between 1931 and 1955. Matthews Ojo referred to them as denominational Pentecostal churches because of their affiliation with churches from the U.S.A and Great Britain. These included The Apostolic Church, The Apostolic Faith and Assemblies of God<sup>28</sup>, The Full Gospel (Apostolic) Church and Foursquare Gospel Church<sup>29</sup> also fall in this category.

Ojo branded these churches as holiness movement based on their doctrinal stress on perfection, strict personal ethics, restitution, bible inerrancy and baptism in the Holy Spirit. The marked difference between the mission-based Classical Pentecostals and the early indigenous (Aladura) Pentecostals is that while the former saw speaking in tongues as evidence of Holy Spirit baptism, the latter placed much emphasis on prophecy and healing.

The last type of Pentecostals is what Ojo referred to as the transdenominational charismatic movement<sup>30</sup>. They are otherwise known as Neo-Pentecostal Churches. They started as interdenominational students fellowships in Nigerian Universities during the early 1970s before their metamorphosis into churches. Majority of them were founded to fill the vacuum created by extremism

25. Paul Gifford (ed). 1992, *New Dimension in African Christianity*, Kenya: Act Print Ltd, p 8.

26. See S. A. Fatokun's Ph.D, 2005, Thesis on Pentecostalism in South Western Nigeria with Emphasis on The Apostolic Church, 1931 – 2001, Dept of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, August 2005, pp. 49 – 53.

27. See S.A. Fatokun, pp. 54 – 55.

28. Paul Gifford (ed). 1992, *New Dimensions in African Christianity*, p. 9.

29. See S.A. Fatokun, p. 57.

30. Paul Gifford (ed). 1992, *New Dimensions in African Christianity*, p. 9.

of the Holiness Pentecostals. Their attitude towards dressing is of less rigor and many who found it inconvenient to conform with Classical Pentecostal rigorous ethical tenets resorted to the Neo-Pentecostal movements.

The Neo-Pentecostals incorporate varying elements of doctrine and practices that identify them with the American and British fundamentalists, evangelists and U.S Pentecostalism. Few of them worthy of note here are Rhema Chapel, Scripture Pasture Christian Centre, Latter-Rain Assembly, Living Faith Church Worldwide, All Nations for Christ Ministry and of course Deeper Life Bible Church which embrace the strict holiness doctrine. It has been established that many Nigerian Neo-Pentecostals were influenced mostly by contacts with the American Faith Preachers, correspondences, literature and tapes of Faith preachers like Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagin, Benny Hinn, Paul (now David) Yongi Cho among others<sup>31</sup>, sharpened their gospel of faith healing and liberation known as "Prosperity Gospel".

In sum, it is pertinent to corroborate Gifford's view that despite the significant differences between Classical or Neo-Pentecostals, members of these movements recognize themselves as part of a special or sacred community<sup>32</sup> bounded by conversion experience. Born again Christianity is a common term for identifying members of the community and the rallying point of their unification.

Therefore this study goes further to elucidate the concept community in both the Redeemed Christian Church of God, an indigenous Pentecostal Church and the Living Faith Church Worldwide, a Neo-Pentecostal church.

### **The Redeemed Christian Church of God and the Living Faith Church Worldwide**

The founder of RCCG, Pa Josiah Akindayomi from Ondo State, Nigeria who was baptized by the Church Missionary Society in 1927, became member of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church in 1931 where he was said to have received divine call to commence a ministry. He started a

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31. See S. A. Fatokun, p. 6.

32. See Paul Gifford, p.9

fellowship called “Egbe Ogo Oluwa” (The Glory of God’s Society) in 1951 with his wife and others at Ebute Metta, Lagos. The fellowship later grew and was later given “the Redeemed Christian Church of God” a name allegedly divinely given in a vision and written down by an illiterate founder.<sup>33</sup>

However, when the present General Overseer of the church Pastor (Dr) Enoch Adeboye took up the mantle of leadership in 1980, the church which initially confined its operation to Lagos, Osogbo and Ondo, spread its tentacles to all the thirty-six states of the Federation. Besides, it has registered its presence in various African countries, America, Europe and Asia<sup>34</sup>.

On the other hand, the Living Faith Church Worldwide, founded in 1983 has relocated its headquarters twice, first from Ilorin (Kwara State) to Kaduna and finally to its present site in Ota on the outskirts of Lagos. The founder, David Oyedepo of Muslim parents, was reported to have been influenced by the Cherubim and Seraphim’s charismatic gifts in Omu-aran, Kwara State. His secession from the church in 1983 was sequel to a divine mandate he claimed to have received urging him to start a ministry that would liberate the world from oppression of the devil through the preaching of the word of Faith. Presently, the church has over 300 branches in Nigeria alone<sup>35</sup>.

### **The Belief Systems of both Churches**

There are a lot of similarities in the belief systems of the Redeemed Christian Church of God and Living Faith Church Worldwide which are anchored on the Bible and in conformity with the general Pentecostal doctrines. They both articulate their principal tenets around themes such as conversion, consecration, sacrificial giving, dominion, abundance rhetoric’s (prosperity), encounter with the supernatural through faith and prayer; divine healing and praise among others. Wisdom, success and vision are concepts exclusively emphasized by the Living Faith Church linking the mental state to the supernatural response.

33. Olusegun Bankole, *The trees clap their hands: A photo book on the Redemption Camp*, Lagos: El-Shalom Publishers, 1999, p.18.

34. Olusegun Bankole, *The trees clap their hands: A photo book on the Redemption Camp*, p.18.

35. Kuponu Selome, 2007, “The Living Faith Church (Winners Chapel): Pentecostal prosperity Gospel and social change in Nigeria”, Ph.D Thesis, University of Bayreuth, Bayreuth, Germany.

Sermons, seminars, books, workshops revolve around these principal themes. Members of these churches as well as their admirers<sup>36</sup> have been greatly influenced as they all hussle to grab copies of their books and sermon tapes. These serve as a strategy of evangelization and re – engineering of the people’s poverty mentality to liberation. The inherent danger in prioritising such books is the tendency by members to substitute them for the Bible. It is assumed that more attention was given to these recommended spiritual literatures for daily devotional activities rather than reading the inspired word of God. It was gathered from the testimonies of many members of the Pentecostal movements that the books are potent enough to bring about prosperity and healing.

One of the central teachings in the Redeemed Christian Church of God is the teaching on poverty which is traced to satanic oppression or affliction. Scriptural passages like Mt 6:26,30, Ps 34:10, Ps 37:25, Phil 4:19, Haggai 2:8 form the bases of the argument that a Christian is not expected to experience poverty since God is a great provider. Pastor Adeboye once said:

If God is my Father and He decides to build mansions for Himself, why should I come into this world and begin to build huts?<sup>37</sup>

However, according to him, to qualify for divine blessing, certain conditions should be met such as selfless living, love of brotherhood, diligence, tithing and sacrificial giving to promote the cause of God. Adeboye is fond of saying:

If you give God one naira, you are not going to die until you get a hundred in return; if you give God zero, he will multiply it by a hundred and you get zero<sup>38</sup>

In a similar vein, such teaching on sacrificial offering is demonstrated in the daily activities of the L F C W. There are cases of giving in terms of

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36. Admirers include Christians from other denominations and Muslims who patronise their programmes.

37. E.A Adeboye, 1996, *Heaven*, Lagos: Christ the Redeemer’s Ministries, page 3.

38. E.A Adeboye, 1996, *The Gift of Love: A study of John 3:16*, Lagos: Christ the Redeemer’s Ministries, p 80.

cars, houses, televisions, jewelleries and other valuable items. This teaching is meant to inculcate in members the attitude of give and take; but unfortunately it has driven some of the members to fall into temptations to get rich syndrome or illegitimate acquisition of wealth, so as to give towards God's project.

However, it must be mentioned that Adeboye and Oyedepo's ideas are at variance with Biblical ideals most especially Lucan<sup>39</sup>. Jesus said "blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven". By implication, it means it is possible for any Christian to be poor. Abogunrin lends credence to this position when he asserted:

The problem of poverty in most of the third world is due mainly to the unjust conditions in the society over which the ordinary man and woman have no control. The rich and the powerful create structure of human relationships that serves to protect their wealth and political power, and thereby deny the poor any access to the resources of the nation<sup>41</sup>

The prevalence of social injustice, therefore, points to the fact that those who are poor do not choose to be poor but have to adjust to the system that they can not change.

It is also observed that emphasis on abundance rhetoric's, message of prosperity and sacrificial giving which Kuponu describes as "ritual",<sup>41</sup> built in members of the churches under review, survival mentality rather than a desire for significance. That is why some highly placed Christians in public service find it convenient to defraud. While corroborating this view, Israel Emmanuel<sup>42</sup> submitted that they engage in such act because of the negative impact that the survival mentality has on them.

39. Holy Bible. Luke 6 v 20.

40. S.O Abogunrin, 2003, "Jesus seven folds programmatic Declaration at Nazareth in Black theology", *An International Journal*, Vol 1, No 2, p 244.

41. S.I. Kuponu, 2010, "Man, Nature and Religious Reproduction. An interrogation of the Rituals and practices of the Living Faith Church Worldwide", NABIS WEST I, p 265.

42. A.S. Hornby, 2000, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (ed) Sally Wehmeir, Oxford: University Press, p 225.

### **The Concept of Community among members of RCCG and LFCW**

By definition, community implies a group of people living in one place or district<sup>42</sup>, or a group of people with the feeling of sharing things and belonging to the same religion or cause. The two Pentecostal churches under review have some practices which build a strong tie among their members.

As stated earlier, it appears that born again Christianity leads to the Born Again community, though not in the strict sense of members living together in one place but having the feeling of belonging to the same movement and a sense of sharing things for the good of all members of the community. The mode of practicing such communal living will be discussed as follows:

First and foremost, these two Christian communities tend to avail their members the opportunities for survival. Between 1980s and now, the rapid economic decline with its attendant woes have resulted into financial incapacitation for most Nigerians. Individuals, mostly youths, who are disillusioned by the bleakly climate and future grasped the message of hope and emancipation that these egalitarian communities offer.<sup>43</sup> The practical support in times of need goes hand in hand with the dispensation of spiritual ministrations. Expectedly, many people flocked these churches.

Oguntoyinbo Atere<sup>44</sup> highlighted the helpline for the less privileged designed by the R.C.C.G which include “God’s provision programme (G.P.P), “A CAN can make a difference,” Heritage Home and African Missions. For the purpose of clarity, apart from the last package – African mission – which is intended to partner with other organizations to sponsor missionary activities in Africa, others are meant to alleviate the hardship of Nigerian populace either through weekly distribution of foods to the poor and prisoners, giving of soft loans to the old and widows, care for the orphans or children of the poor, and of course, scholarship scheme. It is pertinent to note that the gesture discussed

43. Israel Emmanuel, 2010, “shift of a life time,” *Silverbird Television Programme*, become an agent of transformation, May 18, 2010.

44. Oguntoyinbo – Atere, 2005, “The Redeemed Christian Church of God’s programme for the poor in Lagos in the context of Lucan Teaching”, A Ph.D thesis submitted to the Dept of Religious studies University of Ibadan, p. 188f.

above does not permeate all the parishes of Redeemed Christian Church of God nationwide.

Making a critique on these packages, Atere, though appreciated the largesse, she called attention to the empowerment of the less privileged through training for skill acquisition. This, she argued will make them to be competent in various trades so as to become self – employed.<sup>45</sup> In addition, she called for wide publicity to be given to such package so that most people who are ignorant of it can benefit.

In the same vein, the Living Faith Church draws a lot of attention to herself, through her welfarist programmes. Adegboye affirmed that the unprecedented growth of the church is predicated upon her welfarism, most especially through scholarship and awards given to students. He added that “the moment a member is admitted into the church; his/her status begins to change”<sup>46</sup>. This implied that the church as a caring community sees members as one family. In return, members are motivated to contribute generously which accounts for the wealth of the church adjudged as one of the richest in terms of materials in contemporary times.

The caring attitudes in both R.C.C.G and L F C also include, securing accommodation for their members on campuses. Stale students in tertiary institutions make it a binding duty to assist members who are new on campuses. In addition to this is job opportunity that the founders, ministers and members of these churches secure for those in need of it. The driving force is the concept of belonging to one body in Christ. The means of identifications are broaches and stickers displayed on Bibles, handbags, briefcases, cars front doors, etc. These attitudes spontaneously draw members closer to one another.

The second binding factor in this Born-Again community is the improved status of women. While most Mainline churches are still not committed to the issue of women ordination, this discrimination is played to the background in Pentecostal churches under review. They have female Pastors and many women who are workers in the churches.

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45. Oguntoyinbo – Atere, 2005, “The Redeemed Christian Church of God’s programme for the poor in Lagos in the context of Lucan Teaching”, p. 204.

46. Raphael Adegboye, 2009, A critique of wealth Acquisition in the church: A case study of the Living Faith Church Nigeria, A BA project in the Dept of Religious Studies, U.I, p. 54.



Their emphasis on marital fidelity, mutual respect, sharing of family responsibilities and stress on the nuclear family as opposed to the extended family – all tend to improve the position of many women in the home and in the public.

Young women find in these communities, opportunities to construct a space where they can move with relative freedom and dignity. No wonder a cursory journey to gatherings of these churches will reveal an outrageous population of women. This is because they are desirous of associating with a community that places value on them.

Furthermore, the establishment of educational institutions is a design to foster the sense of community among their members. The R.C.C.G established Redeemer's colleges in some states while Redeemer's University was located at the Redemption camp, Lagos-Ibadan, Express way but now moved to Ede town in Osun State. The L.F.C. has Kingdom Heritage Nursery and Primary Schools and Faith Academic schools established in the regional headquarters across Nigeria. To crown this educational feat is the establishment of Covenant University in Ota, as well as two Universities called "Landmark University" in Omu-Aran and Abuja respectively.

It is true that these educational ventures are meant for academic advantages of the Nigerian public, one can see it as a conscious tool to promote a sense of unity among members of these churches, given the fact that the population of members' children admitted yearly outnumber other Christians or Muslims. Despite the high school fees, members of these churches out of dogged commitment send their wards there.

Finally, the camp grounds are a means of fostering a sense of belonging among members. "Redemption Camp" and "Faith Tabernacle" or "Shiloh" has become household names that attract a large spectrum of the country to their monthly and annual spiritual events.

These camp grounds are not only meant for spiritual activities or assuage the affliction that these churches believe many people are experiencing; they also serve other purposes that are beneficial to members. For example, the R.C.C.G camp hosts commercial ventures such as petrol station by the gate of the camp, eateries, banks and guest

houses.

A large expanse of land purchased by estate developers around the Redemption, camp is so amazing considering its size. An in-depth research carried out revealed that there is a collaboration of RCCG with the managers with an intention to establishing a community whereby members would live together in the same area. Already most members of the RCCG have built houses on the land not only for the purpose of annual convention but permanent residency.

The ongoing rush to acquire a piece of land in that site is alarming because according to Pastor Okungade,<sup>47</sup> consideration is given to Redeemed Pastors and members who got the land cheaper than others.

The same could be said also of the L.F.C. which has branches of four international banks in her premises. These banks transact all financial businesses of the church in both the local and foreign currencies. In fact L.F.C is said to have established its own private bank. No doubt, the provision of loans and sale of foreign currencies creates in members the pride of belonging to such a sophisticated Christian community.

### Implications of the Trend on Christianity in Nigeria

It is worthwhile to delve into the implications of the concept of community on Christianity in Nigeria. In the first instance, while the practice of communal living in both the R.C.C.G and L.F.C draws membership to these churches, there is the tendency of invoking "shibboleth"<sup>48</sup> on non-members. *Shibboleth*, a biblical word or pronunciation that distinguishes people of one group or class from those of another, later applied to a criterion to prove membership in a group. In anthropological discourse, the concept means the practice of exclusion, discrimination, victimization and stratification<sup>49</sup>.

This implies that people are discriminated against as a result of their language, colour, or class they belong to. Therefore, the practice of exclusion against non – members of the churches under review brings

47. James Okungade is an Assistant, Pastor of the R.C.C.G, opposite State Hospital Ado Ekiti, Ekiti State.

48. "Shibboleth" on <http://234next.com>

49. "Shibboleth" on <http://234next.com>

into focus what can be described as spiritual or religious stratification within the same body of Christ.

A typical example was the uncharitable way by which a brilliant candidate was edged out about five years ago, during the interview for intending lecturers at the Covenant University, Ota. Although he beat others who applied to teach philosophy, his refusal to change his denomination as proposed by the University management, deprived him of the offer.<sup>50</sup>

Secondly, the habit of not extending the largesse either spiritual or material to other Christians jeopardizes Jesus' prayer on unity among his followers, which he was convinced is the only proof that they are his disciples. Though He was holy, He showed kindness to people that the religious authority of His time considered as "outcast".

In sum, the attitude of "holier – than – thou" within the Born Again community could be interpreted as over – evaluation of self which is sinful before God, the creator of all humankind.

This attitude runs contrary to the inclusive nature of Christianity as espoused by the early church and imbibed by the Mainline churches in Nigeria.

## Conclusion

The discussion, so far, has articulated in concrete terms, the practical ways by which some Pentecostal churches retain their members and also through social welfare and academic programmes, win non-members to their fold. However the study has exposed the tendency of the invocation of "*shibboleth*" – the practice of exclusion, discrimination and stratification on non-members of the Pentecostal communities under review. Apart from the fact that such practice is unbiblical considering the story of the Good Samaritan,<sup>51</sup> Christian ethics of love of one's neighbour lends credence to the danger of the practice of exclusion.

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50. Valentine Aderibole, an interview respondent, clergy, 45 years old, 2012.

51. Luke 10:30-37.

Therefore, it is not sufficient for any Christian organisation to pay attention to expansion strategies at the detriment of the golden rule which commands that charity should be extended to all peoples irrespective of colour, political or religious inclinations.

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