

The challenge of money and wealth in some East African Pentecostal Churches

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Abstract

One of the most disturbing questions of our times in Eastern Africa, and Kenya in particular, is: has Christianity that began as a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, shifted to being material-minded? Are the modern churches willing to die for their people as in the case of the early church and as its Master did? Is it necessary for the African church in the 21st century to accept such a fate? In its methodology, the article surveys the place of wealth and the church from a historical perspective. It goes on to assess this in light of some Pentecostal churches such as Jubilee Christian Centre (JCC), Deliverance Church of Kenya (DCK), Maximum Miracle Centre (MMC), Redeemed Gospel Church (RGC) and Christ is the Answer Ministries (CITAM), among others. This article was researched through reading of extensive materials, interviews with church members, former members, church leaders, critics and sympathisers and through participant observation. While appreciating the new religio-social paradigm in ecclesiastical matters – where science and technology becomes an important component in the African churches of the 21st century, hence the money factor – the article seeks to show the need for a balance in the handling of church and personal finances. It also cautions about the need to avoid wholesale condemnations of churches, especially with regard to the question of wealth and money.

Introduction

Christianity began as a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. When it went to Athens, it became a philosophy. When it went to Rome, it became an organisation. When it went to Europe, it became a culture. When it went to America, it became a business – Anonymous.

On a visit to the Nairobi Pentecostal Church, Valley Road, one mid-morning in February 2011, the researcher noted that the church service began at

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around 10 a.m. though there were some people dancing to music from their powerful public address systems. But, before the preaching started, an announcer called the attention of the congregation to an upcoming event. Subsequently, the lights went off in the main auditorium. The projector screen slowly rolled down from the ceiling – then an advertisement that rivalled any current one on Kenyan television played out. The event, the advert noted, was going to be big, something more than the usual speakers. This time, a group of chief executive officers (CEOs) from blue chip companies were to speak on excellence. The dates were eventually marked in diaries by the members of the congregation.

A visit to the neighbouring Pentecostal churches in the cities of Nairobi and Mombasa, Kenya, such as: Mombasa Pentecostal Churches (MPC), Deliverance Church of Kenya (DCK), Jesus Is Alive Ministries (JIAM-Nairobi), Jesus Celebration Centre (JCC-Mombasa), Neno Evangelism Ministries, The Happy Churches, Faith Evangelistic Ministries, Jubilee Christian Centre (JCC-Nairobi), Christ is the Answer Ministries (CITAM-Nairobi) and the Winners Chapel International Ministries, among others, showed similar scenarios. Interestingly, leadership in these churches rightly contends that without money, they cannot preach the Gospel of Christ at the rate they need to. The money aspect as a fundamental factor in evangelising to the modern world is viewed positively not only by the Pentecostal pastors but also by some leading theologians from the mainstream churches (Anglicans, Methodists and Presbyterians among others). For instance, in a financially buoyant church, a pastor with a flock of 500 can reach the whole country through televangelism; and that needs money. In an interview, others argued that without economic power, the Church cannot have a seat in the boardrooms where decisions on how the world runs are taken.

It is noteworthy that the Kenyan Attorney General, Amos Wako, confirmed in 2007 that his department is overwhelmed by an increasing demand for registration by Pentecostal churches. He went on to explain that the facility is facing difficulties in processing 6 740 pending applications by various religious organisations.¹ By 2010, there were approximately 10 000 registered churches in Kenya; additionally, about 60 applications of new churches and related organisations were causing an increasing backlog to the office of the registrar of societies.

¹ A. Ndegwa, "Over 6000 churches awaiting registration.", *The Standard*, 4th September 2007, 6.

General characteristics of Pentecostal churches

Corporate structure

The rise of the corporate church is not unique to Kenya. Indeed, some of the world's famous televangelists, who have preached to hundreds of thousands in Kenya, have also emphasised the concept of organising the church in a corporate structure. In his book, *The great investment: faith, family and finances*, televangelist Bishop TD Jakes warns against the lack of balance in the handling of church and personal finances. He notes:

I have watched with great fascination as the church has moved from fad to fad and from phase to phase. In the process, we have often gone from one extreme to the other, disregarding the significance of balance ... Balance is a difficult thing to attain. Yet balance and prosperity go hand in hand. No one would last long in business if they never balanced their accounts or cheque book. Yet we often fail to balance our thinking and have found ourselves with insufficiencies because of dangerous extremes.²

Again, in December 2006, Benny Hinn Ministries, associated with televangelist Benny Hinn, issued an appeal for donations towards the purchase of a new corporate jet valued at about \$36 million (Sh2.34 billion). Fuel and maintenance were estimated at more than Sh45 million a year. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, few international evangelists in Kenya rivalled German preacher Reinhard Bonnke in popularity. His crusades at Uhuru Park (Nairobi city) and Afraha Stadium in Nakuru were "must-attend events" for thousands of Christians across Kenya. Nevertheless, Bonnke's "works of amazement" were questioned publicly, as some viewed them with scepticism. Interestingly, during a Bonnke crusade in December 2001 at the Grace of God Mission Church in Onitsha, Nigeria, a local pastor claimed to have been raised from the dead by the renowned televangelist.³

Certainly, the idea of organising the church in a corporate structure requires of the church to have the financial muscle to do so successfully. In turn, this forces the respective adherents to donate heavily, lest the corporate structure fails to sustain itself. In turn, this leads us to the need for acquiring properties in the church's bid to sustain her corporate structure.

² TD Jakes, *The great investment: faith, family, and finance* (Putnam Adult, 2000), 11.

³ <http://www.nation.co.ke/Features/lifestyle/Seek%20ye%20%20first%20the%20Kingdom%20and%20its%20money%20/-/1214/1097634/-/item/2/-/15sshck>.

Acquisition of properties

Mainstream churches such as the Presbyterians, Anglicans, Methodists, Catholics and others own land, guest houses, hotels and even universities such as the Kenya Methodist University, St Paul's University, Anglican University, and Presbyterian University among others. The PCEA⁴ St Andrew's Parish, for instance, has a Sh100 million apartment complex in the neighbourhood of State House, Nairobi, designed for the upper class and expatriates for a monthly rent of Sh70 000 to Sh90 000. To acquire the property, the congregants contributed towards the construction of these modern apartments to enable the church to earn an extra income; hence have enough money which was hoped to be channelled to missions so as to reach people with the Gospel and build churches, schools and hospitals in different parts of the country. As Reverend Buri explain: "Each year we run missions, medical camps and outreach programmes that require money. We cannot always depend on the mother church."⁵

Nevertheless, Reverend Dr Timothy Njoya perceptively acknowledges that all churches with modern management cannot be painted with the same brush; for just like the state, the church has traditionally held assets in trust of its mother churches. These assets have moved from being "idle land to stocks, bonds and other forms of business. And there are those who are doing an exceptional job managing their interests and leading their flocks in the right direction".⁶ Pastor Jumba of CITAM says that the value of the corporate church is much greater than just furthering church activities. He says, "It's all about telling them how to live a holistic life. We cannot tell them about structure in their lives when we, as the church, do not have a structure to adhere to."

Certainly, a shift in matters of religion does not come without its challenges. As the retired minister of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Timothy Njoya, avers, "The question we should be asking is whether it is possible for the church as an organisation to evolve in its operations while the message remains the same." This evolution does "not reflect the teachings of Jesus Christ". The early church was willing to die for its people "like its master did. Can the modern church accept such a fate?" Njoya further argues that in the race for self-sustenance and survival in a world where religion has not escaped a cutthroat competition for followers, sometimes the underlying message of Christ is lost. He notes further that in a bid to cut that corporate image "it is very easy for a church to forget its true self since it will have to brand itself in a certain way. Hence its followers will conduct themselves in the manner their church does, which may or may not be as Christ himself

⁴ PCEA refers to the Presbyterian Church of East Africa.

⁵ Interview with Reverend Edward Buri January 9, 2011.

⁶ Interview with Timothy Njoya December 20, 2010.

wanted”.⁷ Njoya’s caution compares with William Wilberforce’s view when he lamented thus, “I continually find it necessary to guard against that natural love of wealth and grandeur which prompts us always, when we come to apply our general doctrine to our own case, to claim an exception.”⁸

Theology of Pentecostal churches in Eastern Africa⁹

Historically, precursory events led to the strong presence of Pentecostal churches in Kenya. First was the East African Revival Movement, which was born in Rwanda in 1927 and spread over to Kenya through Uganda by 1937. It was characterised by mass conventions with hundreds and at times thousands of attendees. In their operations, the *Balokole* (adherents) saw themselves as the new clan of God in Africa; operating along the same lines as traditional African clans, but also cutting across traditional clan obligations. For that reason, “... each man will have to bear his own load” (Gal. 6:5), and had to “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2). In Buganda, they refused to participate in some African cultural practices such as twin rituals and the last funeral rites among others. They remained critical of the Anglican Church and other mainline churches while remaining part of them. They also became critical of society without withdrawing from it.¹⁰

The strong presence of Pentecostal churches in Kenya begun in 1960 when the internationally renowned American evangelist, Billy Graham, visited Kenya. He was closely followed by another renowned evangelist, TL Osborn, whose series of crusades gave impetus for open air preaching.¹¹ David Barrett has noted that an earlier crusade by Osborn in 1957 at

⁷ Interview with Timothy Njoya December 20, 2010.

⁸ <http://www.apuritansmind.com/stewardship/ShortQuotesOnWealth.htm>.

⁹ On this, it is essential to appreciate that Prof Allan Anderson of Birmingham University, an acknowledged expert on Neo-Pentecostalism in Africa and worldwide, has dealt in the continental context of Neo-Pentecostalisation of African churches *in his book*, African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th century (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001), 282 pp, ISBN 0 86543 884 6. In this, Anderson provides an overview of African initiated/independent churches throughout sub-Saharan Africa. It examines the emergence and growth of churches resulting from the interaction between Christianity and African pre-Christian religion. Concise histories, teachings, beliefs and practices of representative churches in different African countries are examined and analysed, from the earliest "Ethiopian" and "African" churches emerging at the end of the nineteenth century to the later, more prolific "prophet-healing" and "spiritual" or "Spirit" churches (which is the main focus), and the "new Pentecostal" or "Charismatic" churches at the end of the twentieth century.

¹⁰ Kevin Ward, “*Tukutendereza Yesu*” The Balokole Revival in Uganda,

<http://www.dacb.org/history/uganda-balokole.html>.

¹¹ Aylward Shorter and Joseph N. Njiru, *New Religious Movements in Africa* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2001), 18, 28.

Mombasa led to a “widespread Pentecostal movement”.¹² A visit, in 1968, by another Pentecostal preacher, Oral Roberts, and his subsequent healing rallies in Nairobi marked a major turning point in the history and establishment of Pentecostal churches. Pentecostalism in Kenya and East Africa thus benefited from the existing East African revival movement, even though the “spirit of Pentecostalism” had been in East Africa as early as 1895, when the African Inland Mission was first founded in Kenya. Other theories have it that the presence of Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG) can be traced in Kenya from as early as 1938. To this end, crusades by Osborn and others could have catalysed its growth and not necessarily its birth.¹³

An idiosyncratically Pentecostal theology commonly shared by the above mentioned East African Pentecostal churches is the teaching and practice of baptism of the Holy Spirit. Of particular emphasis is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit for salvation, witnessing, prayer and healing. A person who does not have the gift of speaking in tongues (glossolalia) is encouraged to pray for it plus other supernatural gifts such as prophesying, discerning and healing among others. In particular, glossolalia or speaking in tongues is regarded to be the physical sign of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon an individual, as was in the case of the early Church (cf. Acts 2).

For them, salvation is linked with conversion since it is received by faith and appropriated by baptism and a life of holiness. When a member from the mainline churches joins these Pentecostal churches, he is re-baptised through immersion as opposed to sprinkling – a trend that is regarded as “not baptism” – for a true Christian must be immersed in water three times from the Trinitarian formula. This compares with the African Inland Mission (AIM), which was the only missionary society beholden to American Pentecostalism, and which stormed out of the so-called Kikuyu Ecumenical conferences of 1913 and 1918 and afterwards withdrew from the proposed federation of mission societies because they had a bone to pick with the rest. In particular, they could not understand how they could fit well in a schema that was to include Anglo-Catholics, whom, they felt were not Protestant or evangelical enough. At one stage, AIM was asking for liberty to be able to rebaptise Anglicans who were attending Baptist churches, should they wish it.¹⁴

AIM, which was founded in America in 1894 with the intention of evangelising the African mainland, compares well with modern Pentecostal churches in Eastern Africa of the 21st century. In then British East Africa,

¹² David Barrett, *The Kenya churches handbook: the development of Kenyan Christianity 1498-1973* (Kisumu: Evangel Publishing, 1982), 26.

¹³ See Aylward Shorter and Joseph N. Njiru, *New religious movements in Africa*, 27f.

¹⁴ Z. Nthamburi, “The beginning and development of Christianity in Kenya,” in Zablon Nthamburi ed. 1995. *From Mission to Church: A Handbook of Christianity in East Africa* (Nairobi: Uzima, 1995), 22.

AIM was unique when compared with other Christian missions, especially due to its extreme evangelical views – coupled with a peculiar emphasis on the authority of the Scripture.¹⁵ It drew its missionaries from various denominational churches. In turn, this made its support – unlike that of the other missionary societies – come from particular congregations; hence, it was well grounded in the grassroots. Thus, many Protestant missionaries, including those from as far afield as Europe, who sought to come to Africa and had evangelistic zeal, preferred associating with AIM rather than other non-evangelistic denominations.¹⁶ AIM – which was first founded in Kenya by Peter Cameron Scott when he established a Station at Nzau in Kambaland in 1895, the year Kenya was declared a British Protectorate – found it imperative to coach Africans in literacy skills so that they could read the Bible – a phenomenon that was kept carefully subordinate to the prime evangelistic objectives.

In the Kikuyu Conference of 1913 (of mission societies) and attended by Gospel Missionary Society (GMS), German Lutheran Mission (GLM), Friends Africa Mission (FAM), Seventh Day Adventists (SDA), Church Missionary Society (CMS), Church of Scotland Mission (CSM), United Methodist Mission (UMM), and African Inland Mission (AIM), Mr Hulburt of AIM gave reasons for supporting the alliance of missions largely for evangelistic (read Pentecostalist) reasons. As Capon notes,

Mr. Hulburt of the AIM gave reasons for his convictions that Federation was right. He felt that it would make evangelism, translation, educational and industrial work more effective. It would impress upon the natives [read African Christians] the meaning of the One Church, united in the worship of God and claiming One Message ...¹⁷

Like AIM, Pentecostal churches considered in this article (read MPC, JIAM, JCC, JCC, CITAM) have a distinct theology that is characterised by belief in the Trinity, the authority and inspiration of the Bible, salvation by faith through Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection. Characteristically, they zealously look forward to parousia (Greek term, *παρουσία*, meaning “arrival”, “coming” or “presence”). In turn, parousia or Second Advent is the anticipated return of Jesus Christ from Heaven to Earth. This prophecy is found in the canonical gospels and is part of most Christian eschatologies. Christians believe the anticipated event is predicted in Biblical Messianic prophecy. Views about the nature of Jesus's Second Coming vary among

¹⁵ EN Wanyoike, *An African pastor* (Nairobi: EAPH, 1984), 116.

¹⁶ EN Wanyoike, *An African pastor*, 116-7.

¹⁷ Capon quoted in EN Wanyoike, *An African pastor*, 118.

Christian denominations and sometimes among individual Christians within these denominations.

Concerning the atoning work of Christ, biblical texts such as Romans 3:23-26, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 3:13, Lev. 16:8 and Heb 9:7, 12 and 28 are commonly used. The atoning work of Christ is understood and preached in terms of penal substitution. To this end, Jesus is the gift of God to the world as a substitute, suffering the penalty or punishment justly deserved by the unrighteous. In their rejection of infant baptism, they appeal to Mark 16:16 and contend that baptism should strictly be a declaration of faith, a public affirmation of accepting Christ as the lord and saviour of a particular individual.

Characteristically, Pentecostal churches are exuberant in their mode of worship – a phenomenon which is spiced by lively dancing, sophisticated music gadgets with melodies akin to contemporary secular music. The mode of delivering the sermon is such that a pulpit is avoided or removed from the church altogether. The poignant and/or alluring preacher in his or her “tailor-made” sermon appeals to the psychological as well as the material needs of the assembly. Due to his or her beguiling presentation, the preacher holds the audience captive for more than one hour; sometimes for three hours. The sermons emphasise physical and spiritual breakthroughs in business, acquiring good jobs, wealth and general prosperity. Sometimes, biblical phrases are used out of context in the preacher’s bid to deliver his or her theme. Sometimes, themes of leading open air meetings or crusades are put on bill boards; and may read: “Signs and wonders crusade”, “Come for your miracle”, “Come for your healing”, “Come for your financial breakthrough”, “All your physical needs will be prayed for”, among others. Sometimes, a person moves round the city announcing an impending healing or breakthrough crusade atop a powerful vehicle where powerful public address system gadgets are mounted. In appealing to vulnerable people in search of fulfilment in their lives, the emphasis on “God doing a new thing in our lives” is clearly evident. This agrees with Jenkins (citing Richard Shaull) when he says, “in Pentecostalism, poor and broken people discover that what they read in the Gospels is happening now in their midst”.¹⁸ In view of this, the Pentecostal approach may be seen to reflect basic principles of market capitalism – a phenomenon that is driven by the demands of popular consumerism. In this model, what sells best is produced, packaged and supplied as a result.

Characteristically thus, the emphasis on the gospel of prosperity has become the backbone of Pentecostal theology in Kenya. To this end, Damaris Seleina Parsitau and Philomena Njeri Mwaura concede thus:

¹⁸ Philip Jenkins, *The next Christendom: the coming of global Christianity* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 128.

In Kenya, as in Asia, this trend is also noticeable and some Pentecostal Christians have advanced in terms of their socio-economic status. Credit for this is owed partly to the gospel of prosperity and divine blessing that many of these churches support and preach. Pentecostal televangelists in Kenya, such as Bishops Mark Kariuki, JB Masinde, Pius Muiru, Margaret Wanjiru and Wilfred Lai, who are exponents of this theology, have challenged the urban poor to believe in a mighty God who will meet all their physical and spiritual needs. The gospel of prosperity, for all its flaws and abuses, has – surprisingly – attracted large followings into these churches in search of this God who meets all their needs “according to his riches in Glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). It has challenged people to rise above their social deprivations and believe in their own agency.¹⁹

The money and wealth factor

Characteristically, their teaching on giving is more elaborate than in the case of the mainline churches (Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists etc). Their emphasis is that giving, especially tithing, is a sure way of getting one's socio-spiritual breakthrough. This breakthrough can be in the form of healing, finance, marital success, promotion in the workplace and other favours from God. Biblical verses, such as Malachi 2, are elaborately expounded to build the case for life breakthroughs.

In a televised sermon on the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, based on the crucifixion of Jesus, Bishop (then Pastor) Margaret Wanjiru of Jesus Is Alive Ministries (JIAM), which is part of the larger Redeemed Gospel Church (RGC), on September 20, 2002, explained that the central core of her application was that Christ's nailed feet and hands were for the blessing of our hands and feet. She also explained that the holes punctured into Christ's hands are the assurance that “there can be no holes in our pockets or bank accounts (sic) because Christ has borne it on our behalf”. In 2006, Bishop Wanjiru went on to say,

Christ shed his blood from his hands and feet so that we may be rich ... With our hands we labour to make wealth and with our feet we walk into our inheritance ... The Calvary package not only included salvation but also included the prosperity and inheritance of our hands and feet. We are supposed to be

¹⁹ Damaris Seleina Parsitau and Philomena Njeri Mwaura, “God in the city: Pentecostalism as an urban phenomenon in Kenya,” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiae*, South Africa, October 2010, 36(2), 95-112, 101.

partaking of these blessings every day of our lives as God's children.²⁰

Founded in 1996 with only 30 members, Jesus Is Alive Ministries (JIAM) under the leadership of Wanjiru, who also doubles as a member of parliament for Starehe Constituency of Nairobi since 2002, has offices and adherents in South Africa, London, California, Uganda, Tanzania and Malawi. This compares with other financially well-oiled Pentecostal churches whose tremendous growths are evident. In particular, Deliverance Church was founded in 1969 in Uganda and registered in 1970 in Kenya under Joe Kayo. By 2002, it had over 500 registered local congregations. Similarly, the Redeemed Gospel Church, founded in 1974, has almost the same number of followers as the Deliverance Church.²¹ This drives us to wonder: has money and wealth been a facilitating factor for growth? And where does the money that is used to televise their programmes come from?

The case of Jubilee Christian Centre (JCC)

Bishop Allan Kiuna and his wife Pastor Kathy Kiuna of the Jubilee Christian Centre (JCC) often use the “marketplace” rhetoric in teaching their flock how to succeed at their respective workplaces. Their methodology agrees with that of Christ Is The Answer Ministries (CITAM) whose Pastor, Gilbert Jumba, says: “Church has become much more than a place of worship. It has become a way of life.” He goes on to say, “We want to be relevant in today’s world. The only way to do that is by giving congregants tools to help them live good lives in this day and age.” Another remarkable feature in JCC is organising their “Women of Excellence” workshop aimed at helping women cope with modern life, not through the scriptures alone, but through other means like career and business. “This is the only way to go. It is self-sustenance and an evolution with the times” says Reverend Edward Buri of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Nairobi.²² In March 2011 Mrs Kathy Kiuna’s Mercedes Benz was featured in the Kenyan media as one of the most expensive and luxurious cars in Kenya. While the reason for featuring Mrs Kiuna's car in the media could have been meant to portray the church leaders in a negative way, the reverse is more obvious – as Christians would also want to see their leaders leading stable lives.

²⁰ *Faith Digest*, 15 (2006), 6f.

²¹ Patrick Musembi, “Impact of the Pentecostal Movement of the Anglican Church in Kenya,” *Encounter: An Anglican Forum for Theological Reflection*, No 3, March 2000 (Nairobi: Kenya), 16.

²² <http://www.nation.co.ke/Features/lifestyle/Seek%20ye%20%20first%20the%20Kingdom%20and%20its%20money%20/-/1214/1097634/-/item/2/-/15sshck/>.

The case of Maximum Miracle Centre (MMC)

This church operates in the city centre under the leadership of Bishop (formerly Pastor) Pius Muiru. It holds healing services every Sunday. By 10 a.m. a large crowd gathers on the pavement for the second service; and when the doors open, the crowd swarms into the building, filling the hall to capacity. During this time, Pastor Lucy Muiru, wife of the leader of the church, welcomes the congregation and subsequently leads in conducting the first prayer. This prayer is followed by awe-inspiring music spiced by powerful electronic instruments that are placed and used by trained users from the stage. As the vocalist leads the worshippers, one song leads imperceptibly into another – as they jump, clap, ululate, sing and dance on the spot in a very excited atmosphere which is devoid of proper co-ordination. Interestingly, if a person steps on the other, in the course of dancing, there would be no complaint, as there is natural expectation that “he/she has understood that it was not intended”.

When the Bishop, Pius Muiru, finally arrived much later, the researcher in his 2006 visit to the church noted that the noise gets deafening, as the crowd goes euphoric. Curiously, members were not bothered by the fact the Bishop came when they were already exhausted, tired and sweating profusely, as if this was habitual. Was it because they were used to it? The Bishop swished his trademark white handkerchief in the air as he uttered: “Je... Je..., Jee...” as the members of the crowd completed, “Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!” After a short Bible reading, the Bishop delivered his captivating sermon which was full of promises for “financial breakthrough”, “economic upliftment”, “debt free” and physical healing. In “this crowd, I can see one person who has tried to get a visa to go to America without success. The spirit is showing me that this is over now. I prophesy to you that [since] God has heard you, you will get it now!” the Bishop said as the members responded joyfully. He then called all those who had problems or for any one who wanted to receive a miracle (such as deliverance from evil spirits, prosperity and success in all financial dealings and “everlasting good life”).²³ As people came forward, this was followed by loud murmurs, praying in tongues, as excitement went a notch higher.

The case of the Deliverance Church of Kenya (DCK)

The name Deliverance is derived from Luke 4:8, which refers to Jesus’ deliverance of the “captives” – a term that reflects the vision and mission of the church. For their primary objective is to preach the good news to the poor, to proclaim good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the

²³ *Handbill of the Maximum Miracle Centre.*

prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour – hence, to deliver (cf. Luke 4:16–20).

As noted earlier, the Deliverance Church was founded in 1969 in Uganda and registered in 1970 in Kenya under the charismatic Joe Kayo, a poorly-educated self-confessed wastrel who had actually spent time in gaol, but was saved at a TL Osborn crusade. In 1977; he was moved aside by colleagues in unclear circumstances. By 2011, the head of the Deliverance Church was Bishop Mark Kariuki who has his own “Celebration Time” television programme. On 19 August 2007, he delivered a sermon entitled “Triumphant in all areas”, and spoke of Joseph of Arimathea, thus,

Joseph of Arimathea was rich. God wants you to be worldly so he can establish his covenant. We were told, “Be poor and go to heaven”. That’s wrong theology. We were taught the poorer you are the better. [But] I need to be rich and go to heaven. I want to be rich. We are preparing millionaires here. Our vehicles are coming in a big way. God has decided to bless you, lift you up, [and] change your status.²⁴

Interestingly, the Deliverance magazine, *Integrity*, promotes this charismatic Christianity, with articles such as “Unlocking the potential for your destiny” and “How to delegate work and responsibilities”. Certainly, this is a characteristic seen in all Pentecostal churches of Kenya.

The case of Redeemed Gospel Church (RGC)

The de facto leader of RGC is Bishop Arthur Kitonga. In turn, it is imperative to appreciate that Kitonga came from Anglican stock, his mother being part of the East African Revival. Reportedly, he acted as a revivalist in this vein in Uganda until Amin made life unsafe there. He returned in 1973 to Kenya, and subsequently began a ministry in Mathare Valley in the city of Nairobi in 1974. When he realised the difficulty of building his ministry without huge capital, he approached World Vision for support, which eventually came in 2004. And this eventually saw over 4 000 students in schools being sponsored by World Vision. In 2004, the church opened its own Bishop A Kitonga Academy. In the same year, the Church also celebrated its 30th anniversary in its 15 000-seater church at Huruma on the edge of Mathare Valley, and more than 1 000 other churches in Kenya and eight other African countries.²⁵

²⁴ Paul Gifford, *Christianity politics and public life in Kenya* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers Ltd., 2009), 131.

²⁵ See Paul Gifford, 128ff.

Although the church leadership is highly personalised, as testimonies are full of praises to Bishop Kitonga and his wife, the church is organised under 6 regional overseers. In turn, Kitonga had hoped by 2010 to establish 3 000 churches worldwide, plus to establish a university. Of course this was a tall order, but by 2009 the church was relatively doing well financially as Kitonga's links with other Pentecostal churches in North America were still on. Interestingly, three of Bishop Kitonga's children live in USA. As Paul Gifford noted, RGC's main challenge is that her vision as a Christian church has been "assimilated into the new success/achievement/wealth Christianity".²⁶ And if we agree with Gifford's description, then Pentecostalism is not necessarily evangelical, as Christianity centred on the success/victory/wealth approach cannot be said to be evangelical.

Apart from being theologically inclined to Pentecostalism, RGC's philosophical standpoint is not clearly spelt out. Rather, the Bishop's stand is seen to represent the church's position. During the dark days of KANU's dictatorship (the then ruling party) and particularly President Moi's tenure, RGC through Kitonga were seen to be supportive of the government and did not offer prophetic voices, unlike the mainline churches. Its theological trajectory rested on the view that "the state is God ordained", hence the need to "respect the authorities as a way of honouring God". In view of this, there were reports that its leadership was receiving material or/and financial favours from the establishment. This however changed from December 2002 when the ruling party, KANU,²⁷ was removed from power by the opposition party, the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC), under the previous Leader of the Opposition, Mwai Kibaki, where some of the pastors sought elective political posts (refer to Bishop Margaret Wanjiru, the current MP for Starehe since 2007) and began criticising some government policies openly. In particular, Bishop Margaret Wanjiru beat the then Minister for Sports, the Honourable Maina Kamanda, during the December 27, 2007 general elections. She thus became the duly elected Member of Parliament for Starehe constituency. Nevertheless, RGC's Secretary General, who is the pioneer Kenyan televangelist, Wilfred Lai, holds that they have a well defined theological position. He says,

You were created to succeed in everything ... The Word of God does not allow you to be sick. God never intended you to be sick ... You should never continue the way you are; where you are today is not where you should be. I refuse to be a pastor of people that are going nowhere, of sick people. I refuse to pastor you when you are sickly, that's not where you

²⁶ Paul Gifford, 129.

²⁷ Kenya African National Union party was abbreviated as KANU.

belong. I refuse to be a pastor of poor people (shouted twice)
... Jesus came for the poor, but didn't come to leave the poor
poor. He came to get the poor out of poverty.²⁸

The move into politics

Following the hotly contested Kenyan constitutional referendum of 2005, which the government lost (43% versus 57%), the previously quiet Pentecostal churches heavily opposed its enactment and urged adherents to vote against it on the grounds that it was soft on same-sex relationships among other contentious issues. Apparently, one wing of the government opposed it on the grounds that there were no wider consultations on some issues. After the NO side won, the Pentecostal churches got a taste, and a sense, of their own power. To this end, Bishop Margaret Wanjiru announced in November 2006 that she would stand for parliament in Nairobi's Starehe constituency, the constituency containing both her church, parliament itself and central government offices, against the incumbent Sports Minister, Maina Kamanda. She clarified that she had been harbouring political ambitions and eventually hoped to be president. She now saw no incongruity between religion and politics. She went on to compare herself to Samuel, Moses, and David. She said,

I have not decided on the [political] party to join, but you can be sure I will be in the ruling party. I cannot spoil my image by joining a losing party. Right now I have more than 20, 000 followers who are all in Starehe [constituency]. People love me very much. I know there are others who will back me. Starehe will be a walkover.²⁹

About the same time, Bishop Pius Muiro announced he would contest Nairobi's Kamukunji constituency, then held by the government Chief Whip, and also run for president. The entry of the two senior Pentecostal church leaders brought a backlash against both, and an airing of all sorts of reservations around the whole phenomenon of the "new Pentecostal Christianity". The criticism went far beyond the two. In particular, Mwangi Githahu, a newspaper correspondent in the leading Kenyan *Daily Nation*, carried out an article that called on Kenyans to re-assess the new religious movements and Pentecostalism in particular. In an article called "From rags-to-riches: story of many church leaders in Kenya", Githahu portrayed money as the real god

²⁸ Televised "Family Glory", 10 Sept 2006

²⁹ *The Standard*, 6 Nov 2006, 6.

of some religious institutions.³⁰ And with the Kenyan Members of Parliament being some of the best paid parliamentarians in the British Commonwealth, the readers were driven to see the “god of money” as the driving force in the above scenario. While this is too judgemental and subjective in its attempt to confine church leaders to the church or anyone to one place of work, Githahu’s article helped in poisoning the situation.

Generally, the wealth and motivation of all the new pastors were questioned. As a matter of fact, one commentator wrongly painted Pentecostal leadership with the same brush when he noted, “They have not been fishers of men. Instead, they have been reapers of diamond and gold in an endless mine of desperate souls in search of spiritual nourishment”.³¹ Kenyans were also seen to be some of the most unfortunate peoples of the world; for “when they are not willingly being led to the slaughter house by political tricksters, they are willingly following, in droves, another set of con men and women ... These flashy spivs run multi-million shilling enterprises built on the back of poor and ignorant folk who buy all the claptrap spewed out by self-styled evangelists, prophets, bishops, faith-healers, money-multipliers and so on who claim a direct line to God”.³² To this end, their quest for political leadership was seen as an extension of enslaving the poor through tithes and other forms of giving. Ogalo went on to say that “having tasted the power that comes with spiritual enslavement of flock, many preachers are casting their net wide for political power and a more regular source of material well being”.³³ Others called for tight rules to “tame con artists in clerical garb”. Others wrote articles on “how not to behave when you cross the poverty ridge”. A leading columnist in the Kenya media, Mutuma Mathiu, in the *Daily Nation*, 21 January 2007, ridiculed them with his vituperations by writing an article, “Praise the Lord – and please pass the bag”. MG Kimani wrote that obsession with money and wealth among church leadership is a natural progression. He went on to say:

They live opulent, conspicuous consumption lifestyles completely at odds with the gospel that they preach and the condition of the vast majority of their flock ... There is little doubt that many of them are completely cynical conmen and women bereft of the belief that they daily proclaim and are utter quacks merely out to make a financial killing ... Many of them have the morals of the organisers of so-called “pyramid saving

³⁰ Mwangi Githahu, "From rags-to-riches: story of many church leaders in Kenya", *Daily Nation*, 21 Jan 2007, 4f.

³¹ Otuma Ogalo, "From pulpit to politics: it's a race to unusual greed", *Standard*, 26 Jan 2007, 13.

³² Macharia Gaitho, "New Year: nothing really changes", *Daily Nation*, 3 Jan 2006, 8.

³³ Otuma Ogalo, "From pulpit to politics" 13.

schemes” who rip off the gullible and whose only creed is that somewhere in the Republic of Kenya there is a sucker born every minute. In other words, they are the stuff that many secular politicians are made of.³⁴

While the criticism of Bishops Muiru and Wanjiru went beyond the pale, it however provided an opportunity for Kenyans to express, albeit harshly, how they view some of their church leadership. Some criticisms were obviously farfetched, unsympathetic and misinformed. Some went on to assume that church leaders are caged by the church to an extent that they ceased being ordinary citizens of the land with freedoms of movement, speech, choice and other basic rights. Certainly, poverty of the masses is as bad as the poverty that can be experienced by church leaders or any other citizen.

In assessing this “move to politics”, one need not view church leaders as exclusively citizens of heaven (refer to Philippians 3:20) without appreciating that they too are citizens of their respective countries. Who knows? Perhaps reports on massive corruption in tropical Africa could best be addressed by having more religiously-inclined leaders in the political arena. While appreciating that there can be wayward “brothers” and “sisters” who pose as genuine church leaders, it is critical to appreciate that painting all Pentecostal church leaders with one brush smacks of arrogance, dictatorship, insensitivity, and hatred, and is clearly a gross violation of human rights for a church leader in his or her individual capacity as a citizen of the land. Certainly, Bishop Margaret Wanjiru went on to defeat the former minister (Maina Kamanda) for the second time after a by-election was held two and a half years later (2010). Wanjiru’s victory was probably due to the fact that her constituents were satisfied by the way she handled their finances transparently, among other reasons.³⁵ Coupled with this, her *Jesus Is Alive Ministries* (JIAM) grew even stronger; thereby shaming pundits who thought it would die following her plunge into secular politics. Such examples ought to inform the society about the new religio-social paradigm – a trajectory that Africa of the twenty-first century is finding itself in. That is, a phenomenon where both “Jews” and “Gentiles” are involved in the processes of building and rebuilding the wall (cf. Nehemiah 2:18). To this end, competent church leaders such as Bishop Margaret Wanjiru are called upon to the all-important task of rebuilding the nation.

³⁴ MG. Kimani, “Church and politics”, *Standard*, 24 Oct 2007, 5.

³⁵ In Kenya, each constituency is allocated a certain amount of money by the government, popularly called the Constituency Development Fund (CDF). The local Member of Parliament is expected to oversee its management, especially when implementing developmental projects in the constituency.

Conclusion

The study began by appreciating the critical role of the money factor in the ministries of churches in general and Pentecostal churches in particular. It noted that the financially well-heeled Pentecostal churches are able to make maximum use of science and technology. This enables them to attract both rural and urban populations who are yearning for the “new religio-social” paradigm – a feat the mainline churches may need to borrow from the Pentecostal churches. The article was also able to demonstrate how the money factor has been grossly misunderstood and sometimes mistaken as meaning greed. Certainly, why would an African church emphasise poverty as virtue or the so-called Jürgen Moltmann’s theology of suffering in a continent where the latter is the order of the day? Doesn’t it amount to justifying the status quo? If theology is necessarily contextual and situational, Africa deserves a theology that emphasises hope rather than despair.

While Africa, like Job of wisdom literature in the Judaic Canon, must reject the temptation to curse God despite its sufferings, a theology that encourages more suffering should be resisted. Similarly, Africa must resist the temptation to believe that there must be something wrong with the continued belief in a God who seems to be totally insensitive to the suffering of the people supposedly created by God’s will, as Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), the son and grandson of a family of Lutheran Pastors in Prussia, held. For Nietzsche, since God seemed not to care for His creatures, he was either absent, dead or irrelevant to the immediate needs of the suffering people.³⁶ Seen in this way, Pentecostal theologies of prosperity, as opposed to mainline churches’ theologies of contentment amidst suffering and general poverty, cannot be swept under the carpet. Nevertheless, the study was also able to appreciate that despite the fact that the modern churches need money so as to forge ahead successfully, they however need to appreciate that there are also wayward brothers and/or sisters who pose as genuine church leaders – but whose aim is to exploit the poor.

In appreciating that material needs are overwhelmingly necessary to every person regardless of his/her socio-religious orientation, it is critical to consider Ulrich Zwingli’s caution that “Even if we were not sinful by nature, the sin of having private property would suffice to condemn us before God; for that which he gives us freely, we appropriate to ourselves.”³⁷ Again, as Karl Marx once noted, “Money degrades all the gods of man and converts them into commodities.”³⁸ Similarly, Martin Luther noted that while “Poverty hath slain a thousand ... riches have slain ten thousand. They are very uncer-

³⁶ See Colin Brown, *Philosophy and the Christian faith*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: VF, 1968), 137 ff.

³⁷ <http://www.apuritansmind.com/stewardship/ShortQuotesOnWealth.htm>.

³⁸ <http://www.apuritansmind.com/stewardship/ShortQuotesOnWealth.htm>.

tain, they promise that which they cannot perform; neither can they afford a contented mind.”³⁹ Clearly, Reverend Buri notes that, “Religion has become big business. As a result, the line between religion and the profane has become blurred.” This however needs to be looked into critically, lest a wrong impression is created that “everything Christian is now polluted”, and hence corrupt. In view of this, there are those who choose to model their churches after businesses; and this could lead to better management of the church or to an invitation to corruption. Certainly, it all depends on the intentions of those at the helm of the church. From this, Christianity cannot be said to have begun as a personal relationship with Jesus Christ; rather it was also communal, as Acts of Apostles shows (Acts 6ff). When it went to Athens, it was philosophised. When it went to Rome, especially during the time of Emperor Constantine, it was reduced to a mere organisation. When it went to Europe, it became a culture. Upon being re-introduced by the European missionaries of the 19th and 20th centuries, it became a tool of fighting for liberation from European cultural imperialism in Africa; while in the latter part of the 20th century, it was Pentecostalist. In turn, Pentecostalism has gone beyond inculturation of the Gospel due to its distinctive emphasis particularly on issues relating to money, wealth and general prosperity – a phenomenon that cuts across various churches in the 21st century Africa. Undoubtedly, Pentecostalism cannot be ignored even by the mainline churches – as its influence is quite strong.

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