

# **THE HISTORY OF THE PENTECOSTAL DENOMINATION IN NIGERIA**

Edited by G.S.Chukwuemeka

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## **The History of Pentecostal Denomination in Nigeria**

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this book to the Holy Trinity.

## **LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS AND THEIR INSTITUTIONS**

**1 G.S.Chukwuemeka** is a lecturer at the Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Social and Management Sciences, Edwin Clark University, Kiagbodo, Delta State, Nigeria and Dynamic Theological Seminary, Affiliated to Harvest Bible University, USA

**2 Jonathan O. Dimobika** is a lecturer at Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Imo State University, Owerri, Imo State.

**3 Egbeja Cincin Julius** defended his Doctoral Dissertation in November 2022 at Dynamic Theological Seminary, Kwale, Delta State, Affiliated to Harvest Bible University, USA

**4 Edwin Chinyeremugwu** is a PhD student at Dynamic Theological Seminary, Kwale, Delta State, Affiliated to Harvest Bible University, USA

**5 Akintunde Ojo Sunday** is a PhD student at Dynamic Theological Seminary, Kwale, Delta State, Affiliated to Harvest Bible University, USA

**6 Kingsley Pardung** is a PhD student at Dynamic Theological Seminary, Kwale, Delta State, Affiliated to Harvest Bible University, USA

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

# **THE HISTORY OF PENTECOSTALISM IN NIGERIA**

**by**

**G.S.Chukwuemeka**

### **Brief Origin of Pentecostalism**

The practices and activities of the Pentecostal denomination can be traced to the Book of Acts (Acts 2–4) when the Apostles and other believers received the baptism of the Holy Spirit that climaxed in speaking in tongues. Pentecostalism is a religious movement that gave rise to several Pentecostal churches in many parts of the world in the 20th century. Recalling the Holy Spirit's baptism of the disciples of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, (Acts 2–4), this experience appears to have been common in the Christian movement during its first generations. (J. Gordon Melton, 2021). During

recent decades, Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity (PC/C) has moved from an initially peripheral position to become a force to be reckoned with within African Christianity and sub-Saharan African societies in general. (Martin Lindhardt).

The Pentecostal movement in the 19th century was affected by racial issues in the United States. It started with the Azusa Street revival led by an African American minister who welcomed worshipers regardless of their race. This liberal racial attitude bred controversy, however, as Pentecostalism spread into the Deep South the movement became segregated along the same racial lines like older denominations (J. Gordon Melton, 2021). According to Vason, Pentecostalism is a renewal movement within Protestant Christianity that places special emphasis on a direct personal experience of God, through baptism of the Holy Spirit (Vason, 2010).

Pentecostalism witnessed a wider national and

international expansion, at Azusa Street in 1906 at the Apostolic Faith Gospel Mission at 312 Azusa Street in Los Angeles.(J. Gordon Melton, 2021) William Seymour, a one-eyed Holiness church pastor and former member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, was credited to be the leader of the movement.

During the era of William Seymour the old frame building on Azusa Street became a great spiritual centre, the poor, blacks and whites, Anglos and Latinos, as well as many preachers whose own ministry had become staid were trooping in for spiritual development.

Pentecostal Christians were linked only by an amorphous “spiritual union,” in part because no thought was given to forming a separate “Pentecostal” branch of the Christian church. Protestant churches embraced Pentecostal beliefs and practices, without the mind of withdrawing from their churches because the movement was centred

on revival and reformation. The communicants at Azusa fully expected the prophetically promised of “later rain” ( Joel 2:28 ) to fall upon their churches and make them wholly Pentecostal.

The new congregation of the movement by the beginning of World War I, emerged as storefront missions, small tabernacles in sparsely populated rural areas, and upper-story lofts in squalid urban neighbourhoods. These modest dwellings, found across North America, housed poor but lively groups of Pentecostal believers under such names as the Pentecostal, Apostolic, Latter Rain, or Full Gospel churches. Although many Pentecostals were wary of administrative institutions and unwilling to subject themselves to external ecclesiastical control, various divisive issues drove them into denominational fellowships.

According to Anderson, he notes that Pentecostal

denomination can be divided historically into four broad, which can be listed below;

(1) Classical Pentecostals. This is a Pentecostal with origins near the beginning of the twentieth century; and (2) Independent Pentecostal churches from the same era, especially those in Africa and Asia. But in the statistics so frequently quoted the term also includes: (3) “Charismatics” in older churches from the 1960s onwards, of which Roman Catholic Charismatics are as numerous as classical Pentecostals. Pentecostalism also includes what is probably the fastest growing sector:(4) Independent Charismatic megachurches and “Neocharismatics” that commenced in the mid-1970s, often promote the “prosperity gospel,” and are the most controversial globally. (Allan H. Anderson, 2020, 121–136)

The 21<sup>st</sup>-century Pentecostal denomination can also be divided into different phases ranging from Prophetic, Modern and New Generational Pentecostal

Denomination. Some of these Pentecostal Denominations are different in style and pattern of worship.

The rapid growth of the Pentecostal Denomination in the world can be traced to charity work in many dimensions. According to Miller and Yamamori they note that Pentecostals engaged in various forms of social ministry. (Miller and Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*, 32–33).

A British development practitioner makes a case for the role of “faith groups” in development: They make an important contribution to poverty reduction through providing services and humanitarian assistance, promoting empowerment and accountability, changing beliefs and behaviours, building support for the development and building peaceful states and societies. (Battcock, 250)

J.Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu defines Pentecostalism as the stream of Christianity that believes in, affirms and actively promotes the presence of the Holy Spirit as part of normal Christian life and worship (J.Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu 2005,95).

### **The History of Pentecostal Denomination in Nigeria**

The Pentecostal movement in Nigeria started between 1910 and 1920 when an Anglican deacon launches an indigenous prophetic movement that later becomes the Christ Army Church ( Historical Overview of Pentecostalism in Nigeria, 2020). The explosion of global Pentecostalism in Nigeria emanated from the religious and political scenario of the country between 1950 and 1970. The goal of self-affirmation was glaringly evident in the projects of the nationalists, seeking liberation from the clutches of European Imperialism (D.P. Ukpong, 2008).

Naomi Richman in her long discourse notes that the Pentecostal movement in Nigeria can be divided into different phases.

Pentecostalism in Nigeria is widely recognised to have unfolded in three phases. The first phase, known as Aladura, or the African Initiated/Independent Church movement, (1910-1930s) was led by Yoruba itinerant preachers like Joseph Ayo Babalola who clashed with missionaries on the use of medicine (Peel 1968). The Aladura movement, meaning 'praying for people, emphasised prayer, healing and deliverance from traditional 'pagan' religion. In this period, foreign Pentecostal denominations like the Classical Pentecostal church, Assemblies of God, and the Welsh Apostolic church also laid down roots in Nigeria. The second wave, known as the 'Latter Rain' revival, took place in the 1950s and was initiated by British and American evangelists like Sydney Granville Elton and Oral Roberts. This phase emphasized deliverance, healing and also apocalyptic eschatology. The third wave, known as the Neo-Pentecostal movement, emerged in the

1960s-80s and was heavily influenced by ideas and trends introduced to Nigeria in American evangelical literature. (Naomi Richman, 2020).

Some scholars opined that the religious yearnings of the people were not met by the mainline churches and their missionaries, who compounded their problems through the slave trade. Pentecostalism being a liberation movement found its place easily in the lives of the people. In this regard Mbefo notes;

The Members of mainline churches' expectations from the churches were not met. The missionaries of the older churches failed to address the type of questions the African situation raised for them: witchcraft, demon possession, haunting by the evil spirit, the cult of ancestors; the use of protective charms, talismans; sorcery, and the traditional dancing form of worship at the shrines. The tendency among the missionaries was to dismiss these questions due to ignorance arising from a pre-scientific mentality (L.N.Mbefo, 18)

The above yearning of the people of Nigeria at that critical period generated an avenue for different religious platforms which might bring solutions to their various problems. The dissatisfaction of the general populace and the communicants of the mainline churches with the activities of the already existing churches opened the door for new religious experiences.

Later Spirit-filled groups also expanded, including those known by the Yoruba word *Aladura* (“praying people”). Early *Aladura* churches include the Eternal Sacred Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim Society, founded in 1925, and the Church of the Lord (*Aladura*), founded in 1930. Around 1918, an Anglican man formed a prayer group known as the Precious Stone (Diamond) Society to heal influenza victims. The group leaves the Anglican Church in the early 1920s as an affiliate of Faith Tabernacle, a church based in Philadelphia (Anderson 2001: 80-82).

Apostle Joseph Babalola in the 1930s took the Pentecostal denomination to a greater height. He was of Faith Tabernacle that God used to convert thousands of people in Nigeria and other parts of the world. In 1932, his movement initiates ties with the Pentecostal Apostolic Church of Great Britain after coming into conflict with colonial authorities, but the association dissolves over the use of modern medicine. In 1941, Babalola founds the independent Christ Apostolic Church, which is estimated to have over a million members by 1990 (Anderson 2001: 86-87).

It was also in the same period that foreign Pentecostal denominations like Welsh Apostolic Church (1931), the Assemblies of God (1939) and the Foursquare Gospel Church (1954) were established in the country.

In the 1950s the Celestial Church of Christ arrived western Nigeria from Benin. The church rapidly

expanded to northern Nigeria and became one of Africa's largest *Aladura* churches ( Historical Overview of Pentecostalism in Nigeria, 2020).

In 1952, a former member of the Cherubim and Seraphim society, Pa Josiah Akindayomi, established the Redeemed Christian Church of God. Under Enoch Adejare Adeboye, the church becomes increasingly Pentecostal in theology and practice and grows from an estimated 42 congregations in 1980 to around 7,000 in 2004, with followers in more than 90 countries, including the U.S. (Anderson 2001: 85; Murphy, March 25, 2006; Mahtani, April 26, 2005; Ojo 2004: 4).

A wave of Pentecostal expansion spawns new churches in 1970s. The leader of this expansion is Benson Idahosa, one of Africa's most influential Pentecostal preachers. Idahosa established the Church of God Mission International in 1972. The Deeper Life Bible

Church was also founded in 1975, and soon becomes one of Nigeria's largest neo-Pentecostal churches, with an estimated 350,000 members by 1993 (Ojo 2004: 3).

In the 1980s and 90's the Pentecostal movement witnessed a new wave of revival. In 1986, David Oyedepo established the Living Faith Outreach Worldwide, popularly known as "Winners' Chapel." It opens a "Faith Tabernacle" in the suburbs of Lagos in 1999 that seats 50,000 people (Phillips, 1999). Other churches that were established include Grace of God Mission International by Bishop Dr Paul Nwachukwu, Christian Pentecostal Mission, Dunamis International Gospel by Dr Paul Eneche, Salvation Ministries by Pastor David Ibiyome, Synagogue Church of All Nation founded by the late Prophet T.B. Joshua, New Covenant Gospel Church by Rev Felix Omobude, Latter Rain Assembly by Bishop Francis Waleoke. Apart from these churches, there are other numerous churches established

in this period.

Between 2000 and 2022 Pentecostal Denominations witnessed tremendous growth, some of these denominations like Lord Chosen Charismatic Renewal by Pastor Lazarus Muoka, Christ Embassy by Reverend Christ Oyakilome, Omega Fire Ministries by Apostle Johnson Suleman, God's Delight Assembly by Pastor John Mark I, Global Dynamic Miracle and Deliverance Fellowship by Apostle Gold Sunday Chukwuemeka, Omega Power Ministry by Pastor Chibuzor and host of others.

The social deprivation theory as applied to Pentecostalism led to the speedy growth and numerical explosion of Pentecostalism in Nigeria. The major factors responsible for the spread of Pentecostalism are considered to be deprivation, disorganisation and defectiveness. More so people embraced Pentecostalism

because of its teachings that are scripturally based and its self-authenticating religious experiences.

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(Battcock, “Working Effectively,” 250.)

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