

The Growth of Pentecostalism and the Reshaping of Baptist Faith in Nigeria Since the 1980s

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Abstract

The paper discusses the spread of Pentecostalism in Nigeria from the 1970s, its influence on Baptist liturgy and beliefs, including the diversity brought into the Baptist faith, and the responses of Nigerian Baptists to this new religious change. The paper attempts to interrogate how a conservative evangelical denomination fashioned theologically and ecclesialogically after the Southern Baptist Convention, USA, could be so influenced by some aspects of Pentecostalism within a short time. Hence, it further examines the relationships between the Baptist faith and Pentecostalism since the latter's advancement in the 1980s, which challenged the evangelicalism and religious conservatism of the former.

The present study extends the conversation of the impact of Pentecostal spirituality on various aspects of the Baptist faith in Nigeria, and examines what Randy Arnett (2017) has termed the pentecostalization of the Baptist faith in West Africa. The study reveals that there has been a significant reshaping of the Baptist faith as it incorporated Pentecostal elements and, at the same time, struggled to remain authentically Baptist. This religious encounter has challenged traditional Baptist norms and enriched and diversified the expression of the Baptist faith in Nigeria by incorporating other religious traditions. The encounter has thrown up debates about the essentials of denominational identity: rational theological tradition or religious experience.

Keywords: Pentecostal, Pentecostalism, Baptist, Nigeria, liturgy, beliefs, evangelical, spirituality, Southern Baptist Convention.

Introduction

The encounter of Nigerians with Christianity was a significant part of the historical events of worldwide missions in the nineteenth century and of the general history of Christian missions in Africa. Nineteenth-century missions, generally perceived as civilizing and humanitarian enterprises, catalysed substantial change among the nations and peoples with whom the missionaries and mission societies worked. Missionaries were indeed change agents, the bearers of a whole civilisation, promoters of a new religious culture, and a new social order. Mission strategies such as the introduction of formal Western education, the promotion of Legitimate Commerce to replace the pernicious slave trade and slavery, the establishment of medical mission as a new form of health care over indigenous health care, the founding of industrial and vocational mission to foster new marketable skills, the introduction of large scale of cash crop agriculture, etc., were the means of promoting and sustaining this religious change. Of particular interest are the legacies of literacy, a product of Western education, which stimulated many social, cultural and political transformations in Nigeria and beyond. As argued by Lamin Sanneh (1989) and Andrew F. Walls (1990), the most profound catalyst of missionary Christianity was its transmission through translation, which initially provided the Bible in indigenous languages with an understanding that God could speak directly to African converts. This vernacularisation stimulated inculturation and produced an indigenous understanding of Christianity, though with diverse responses different from the missionary version.

Some scholars have argued that Christian missions were a major ally of European imperialism of the 19th and early 20th centuries. In contrast, a recent discourse by Brian Stanley and others suggests how Christian missions in the twentieth century have been linked to the dynamics of anti-colonial nationalism and decolonisation in the non-western world.¹ In addition, by the late 1960s, publications of T. W. Turner, E. A. Ayandele, J. F. Ade Ajayi, Kenneth Dike, John Mbiti and a host of others gave new interpretations of the responses of Africans to the Christian gospel.

Major Epochs in the Growth of the Nigerian Baptist Convention

Several Baptist bodies exist in Nigeria other than the Nigerian Baptist

¹ Brian Stanley, ed. *Missions, Nationalism, and the End of Empire* (Grand Rapids & Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 2003). See also B. Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), pp. 85-90, 98-101.

Convention (NBC). The notable ones include the African Baptist Church in Shaki and Benin City, established in 1938 and 1942 respectively, which were products of schisms from main Baptist churches in these cities, to affirm polygamy for African Christians. Second, the Gospel Baptist Conference established in 1974, which resulted from the evangelistic activities of Rev. E. A. Atilade, who had worked in several NBC churches, but went his separate ways later. Third, with pioneering mission work in Liberia in 1908, the Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission extended its mission to Akwa Ibom in Southeastern Nigeria in 1958 and has been waxing strong. Fourth, Fundamentalist Baptists, of which the Baptist Mid-Missions from the USA is prominent, began church planting in the early 1980s with churches established mainly in the Southwestern Nigeria cities of Ilorin, Ogbomoso, Ibadan and Lagos. Among the Independent Baptist groups was Freewill Baptist Mission, which debuted in 2006, with some support from the United States. Other Baptist groups emerged that overwhelmingly adopted Pentecostal beliefs and practices in the 1990s, changed their names, and modified their identities to become independent Christian bodies. The varieties of these Baptist groups attest to the congregational dynamics of the Baptist faith.

The NBC is the oldest, largest, most visible, and most organised of all Baptist bodies in Nigeria. The NBC is the organised body of churches, which results directly from the missionary work of the Southern Baptist Convention in Nigeria that goes back to 1850. With about 9,000 churches, 4,000 pastors and a membership estimate of about five million in 2007,² the Convention is the most prominent Baptist body in Africa, the third largest in the world after the Southern Baptist Convention and the National Baptist Convention, USA, and one of the leading evangelical denominations in West Africa. During the AD 2000 and Beyond Movement, 1990-2000, Nigerian Baptists promoted evangelism and church planting such that the number of churches rose from 3,200 in 1990 to 8,650 in December 1999.³ There was an increase to 10,104 churches and about eight million members in 2021.⁴

The origin of the NBC begins with the efforts of Thomas Jefferson Bowen, a native of Georgia, USA, and the pioneer SBC missionary to West Africa, who arrived in the coastal town of Badagry on 5th August 1850. Although Bowen had been preceded in Yorubaland in Southwestern Nigeria eight years earlier

² Nigerian Baptist Convention, *National Church Census, Pilot Project Report* (Ibadan, 2007), p. 1.

³ Banjo Ajao, 'Operation Reach All's Contribution to Nigerian Baptist Missions Efforts', unpublished paper. Ajao was the National Coordinator of ORA from 1997 to 2000.

⁴ Nigerian Baptist Convention (2022), *Annual Reports & Financial Statements for the Year 2021* (Ibadan: BP Productions), p. vii

by the Anglicans and the Methodists working under the Church Missionary Society and the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society respectively, and four years by the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian) Mission, he worked very hard and within the first six years there were thriving Baptist churches in four major Yoruba towns. Additional missionaries joined Bowen in 1853, and despite a short break in 1869-1875 caused by the American Civil War, the work progressed rapidly partly fuelled by competition with the Anglicans who also concentrated their efforts in this same geographical area.

There are six significant epochs in the history of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. As already noted, the NBC began with the arrival of Thomas Jefferson Bowen in August 1850. Generally, the missionaries had an enthusiastic welcome in many towns partly because their superior material culture announced their presence ahead of them. The message they preached was rather strange, but their schooling system and medical skills created inroads into the indigenous society. The missionaries learnt the local languages, preached and taught, and eventually won converts and planted churches. Bowen's monumental book on the Yoruba people and culture,⁵ and later, his grammar and dictionary of the Yoruba language,⁶ gained him recognition and provided more impetus for the mission work. By 1875, the first indigenous ministers had emerged, many of whom had previously served as interpreters or had been trained by the missionaries.

In the second period, beginning in 1888, indigenous leaders became more assertive. The schism from the Lagos Baptist Church in February 1888, arising from a dispute with the resident Southern Baptist missionary, W. J. David, marked a new episode of indigenous leadership in the mission work. This incident gave birth to Native Baptist Church under indigenous leadership, and precipitated similar schisms in the Anglican and Methodist churches resulting in the African Church Movement – a movement that promoted Christianity under African leadership and was more accommodating to African culture – a precursor to African Initiated Churches.⁷ Under African leadership, the Baptist faith spread to the riverine Niger Delta area in 1893, from a partnership in mission between Rev William Hughes of the African Training Institute,

⁵ T. J. Bowen, *Adventures and Missionary Labours in Several Countries in the Interior of Africa from 1849 to 1856* (London: Frank Cass, 1968). First published in 1857.

⁶ T. J. Bowen, *Grammar and Dictionary of the Yoruba Language* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institute, 1858).

⁷ For more on this issue see J. B. Webster, *The African Churches Among the Yoruba*. See also, Matthews A. Ojo, 'The 1888 Schism in the Lagos Baptist Church and Its Aftermath', *Ife Journal of History*, Vol. 2, No 2, Sept., 1998, pp. 114 –143.

Colwyn Bay, North Wales, United Kingdom and the First Baptist Church, Lagos under the indigenous pastor, Dr Mojola Agbebi, an energetic, visionary leader who initiated other missionary activities that expanded Baptist faith to the Midwestern and southeastern Nigeria.⁸

The third epoch witnessed the formation of the Nigerian Baptist Convention in 1914. Baptist churches in Southwestern Nigeria came together to create an institutional forum, the Yoruba Baptist Association, which later changed its name to the Nigerian Baptist Convention when the Baptist faith expanded to other regions. The Convention grew as more churches were planted and mission efforts were extended to different parts of the country through partnership with Southern Baptist missionaries and indigenous pastors. Besides, in the first decade of the twentieth century, Yoruba traders from Southwestern Nigeria extended the Baptist faith to Northern Nigeria when they established homogenous Yoruba-speaking Baptist churches. In the 1940s and 1950s, Southern Baptist missionaries assisted in expanding the Baptist faith to the indigenous peoples in Northern Nigeria. During this period, the Southern Baptist Convention funded the establishment of educational institutions, medical facilities, vocational training centres, and theological institutions, and created a publications unit as an institutional means to sustain growth.⁹

From the 1920s, migrant Yoruba Baptists from Southwestern Nigeria, the region with the highest number of Baptist churches, migrated to other West African countries in search of economic opportunities lacking in their homeland. In these countries, they established homogenous Yoruba-speaking churches and contributed to spreading the Baptist faith to other West African countries of Togo, Ghana, Cote d' Ivoire, Republic of Niger, and Burkina Faso within the first three decades of the twentieth century. These Yoruba migrants with little Western education, a factor which had excluded them from the cash crop economy in their homeland, were engaged in the distributive and retail

⁸ Hazel King, 'Cooperation in Contextualization: Two Visionaries of the African Church: Mojola Agbebi and William Hughes of the African Institute, Colwyn Bay', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 16, No 1 (Feb., 1986), pp. 2-21. See also J. A. Atanda, ed., *Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850 – 1950* (Ibadan: University Press Ltd., 1988) p. 258

⁹ See the following publications for history of Nigerian Baptists: Adedoyin, I. A. *The Place of Ogbomoso in the History of Nigerian Baptists* (Ibadan: Penthouse Publications, 2005). See also Eades, J. S. *Strangers and Traders: Yoruba Migrants, Markets and the State in Northern Ghana*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press for the International African Institute, 1993). J. A. Atanda, ed., *Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850-1950: Accounts of Their Foundation and Growth* (Ibadan: University Press Ltd., 1988). S. Ademola Ajayi, *Baptist Work in Nigeria, 1850-2005: A Comprehensive History* (Ibadan: Book Wright Publishers, 2010). S. Ademola Ajayi, *Baptist of Nigeria: Their Genesis, Identity, Doctrinal Beliefs and Practices 1850-2005: A Comprehensive History* (Ibadan: Book Wright Publishers, 2009). T. J. Bowen, *Adventures and Missionary Labours in Several Countries in the Interior of Africa from 1849 to 1856* (London: Frank Cass, 1968). Travis Collins, *The Baptist Mission of Nigeria, 1850-1993* (Ibadan: Associated Book-Makers, 1993).

trade in these West African countries. For example, by 1969, there were about 90 Yoruba-speaking Baptist churches in Ghana.¹⁰ These were indigenous initiatives with far-reaching socio-political implications. The reports of these evangelistic efforts sent back to Nigeria and shared with the missionaries of the Southern Baptist Convention in the country partly stimulated the Foreign Mission Board of SBC to initiate mission work with residential missionaries in Ghana, Togo, Cote d'Ivoire, Republic of Benin, and Burkina Faso in 1947, 1964, 1966, 1970, and 1971 respectively. These initiatives strengthened and coordinated Baptist work already begun by the Yoruba traders.¹¹

The fourth period was from the mid-1950s, when political independence in many African nations accelerated the indigenisation of the leadership and structures of many organizations in Africa, including the Church. With courage and commitment, an indigenous missionary board, the Foreign and Home Mission Board, was established in 1953 to direct the missionary efforts of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. Hence, there was expansion into other regions of the country. By 1960, it had embarked on foreign missions to Sierra Leone.¹² More attention was also given to educational work by establishing more elementary, secondary, teachers' training colleges, and leadership training for the Convention.

In the fifth period beginning from the 1970s, Nigerian Baptists initiated new projects within the Convention including the establishment of more theological institutions, taking over student and youth ministry from the Southern Baptist missionaries, initiating partnerships with the Texas General Baptist Convention and Alabama Baptist Convention for evangelism and social development, increasing its funding which soon made it self-independent and self-sustaining. Foreign missions also boosted with the opening of a second international mission field in Ivory Coast in 1996. After that more missionaries were appointed and sent to Republic of Niger, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Chad, Republic of Benin, Guinea, Mali, and in 2006 partnership began with the Mozambique Baptist Convention as part of its bold foreign mission thrust. After almost five decades of planning, Nigerian Baptists established Bowen

¹⁰ Paul O. Kolawole, 'The Dynamics of Trade and Religion Among Diaspora Yoruba Baptists in West Africa, 1919-2004' (Unpublished PhD thesis, Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, Nigeria, June 2007) See also Matthews A. Ojo, *Yoruba Diaspora Experience in Ghana and the Making of Isaac Deji Ayeboyin* (Ibadan, 2019).

¹¹ Baker J. Cauthen and Frank K Means, *Advance to Bold Mission Thrust: A History of Southern Baptist Foreign Missions, 1845-1980* (Richmond: Foreign Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention, 1981), p. 382.

¹² Anne Neil, *Herald of Good Tidings: A History of the Home and Foreign Mission Board, Nigerian Baptist Convention, 1953-1971* (Ibadan: Baptist Press, 1976), pp. 68-71.

University in July 2001, which was named after the pioneer American missionary, Thomas J. Bowen. Bowen University was the first Baptist university in Africa, and by 2018, it had about five thousand students, a medical school and a law school. Its excellent quality education has garnered much support for the institution.

In general, the distinctive features of Nigerian Baptists included strong biblical emphasis, a strong commitment to evangelism and missions, a strong sense of the autonomy of churches and equality of all believers within the congregational polity, belief in believers' baptism, some measure of pietistic culture, and a kind of conservative evangelicalism. The leadership of the Convention and its churches was dominated by the highly educated middle class, many of whom were trained in theological institutions in Nigeria and abroad.

Overall, a consciousness of a Baptist identity arising from the legacies of the Southern Baptist mission endeavours in quality education and health care, a solid evangelistic culture, and the notion that the Baptist association could foster unity and a participatory democratic culture within the congregational polity which could not be found in other Christian denominations in the country. As I have argued elsewhere, during certain defining moments of controversies and crises within the Nigerian Baptist Convention, this identity has been challenged and reaffirmed through debates and pamphleteering that disseminated opinions and views that offered alternatives to those generally provided by the leadership and the Executive Committee of the Convention. The discussions, conversations, and face-to-face encounters at the annual Convention-in-sessions were most interesting, and some of them have sought to define, redefine or promote a principled understanding of the Nigerian Baptist identity. In every case, the historical legacy of Southern Baptist work has shaped the sense of this identity.

Baptist churches in the urban areas have primarily been very influential in the affairs of the Convention as they provided a more significant percentage of the Convention's income. However, in the rural areas, the membership consisted mainly of the grassroots still struggling for economic sustenance. Despite the competition from Pentecostals and Charismatics from the mid-1980s, Nigerian Baptist churches grew in membership through biological growth and conversion. Though formed from the crucible of the Southern Baptist Convention, the Nigerian Baptist Convention since 1997 has been ordaining women as pastors, the result of agitation by educated and seminary-trained women within the Convention in the 1990s. The first two women were ordained in 1997, and the doors became widely opened for mainstreaming

women leadership into the Convention. A few women have held apex leadership positions as Directors of central departments. By 2022, two women had been appointed as Rectors of Baptist Theological Institutions, a significant shift in the African patriarchal tradition.

The Growth of Pentecostalism in Nigeria

In the early 1970s, a new religious awakening built on Pentecostal beliefs and practices emerged in Nigeria and was vigorously promoted by university and college students and young graduates. Though small in number, this class of educated elite had an enviable status in Nigerian society—which gave much visibility to the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. This new Christian awakening expanded the influence of foreign and indigenous Pentecostal churches that had existed in Nigeria since the 1930s but had remained a fringe religion.

It was the rise of the Charismatic Renewal in early 1970 that greatly expanded Pentecostal spirituality to such an extent that it significantly influenced members of mainline Protestant churches, including Baptists. By the late 1970s, most of the mainline Protestant Churches – Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian - had causes to react to the growing influence of the Charismatic Renewal that was seeping into these denominations and causing apprehension among the leadership of these denominations. Initially, blame was laid against Scripture Union, then the mostly widely known para-church evangelical organization for young adults. Consequently, Scripture Union issued adverts disclaiming the Pentecostal emphases and disclaiming members that were propagating such Pentecostal beliefs.

Beginning in the early 1970s, Pentecostals insisted that all Christians must undergo the experience of baptism of the Holy Spirit at a certain point in their lives, as a second experience after conversion, and they must speak in tongues to confirm the inward experience. The gift of tongues was accepted as the primary evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and as part of the elements of corporate worship in Pentecostal churches. It was assumed that the person who speaks in tongues is a better Christian than others who do not. Crucial to the spread of Pentecostal Christianity in Nigeria is the role of personal testimonies given publicly in worship services, which have enabled an easy communication of the success stories of the churches and their founders as channels through which God demonstrated His power.

Beginning from the campuses of higher institutions where the Charismatic Renewal first took root, the new Christianity attracted many young adults who

spread the new faith to the mainline Protestant and Catholic churches in the cities. By the mid-1970s, a strong proselytisation had begun as some college students and graduates organised open-air evangelistic meetings and camp meetings in various towns. Eventually, some graduates became the founders of para-church organisations and independent Pentecostal and new Charismatic churches. The success of mega Pentecostal churches in the new millennium pioneered by these college graduates further attracted more Christians. Major Pentecostal and Charismatic organisations that are spread worldwide include Living Faith Church (Winners Chapel), Redeemed Christian Church of God, Mountain of Fire and Miracles, and Deeper Christian Life Ministry, all of which originated in Nigeria.

In the 1970s, Charismatic organisations operated like Bible study or evangelistic groups, holding their meetings only on weekdays and offering Bible studies or prayer meetings to their members in addition to the regular activities in their Protestant churches. Hence, they described themselves as inter-denominational or non-denominational organisations. However, by 1983, some groups had initiated Sunday worship services, thus adopting denominational status. They also erected permanent places of worship instead of holding meetings in rented spaces. By the mid-1980s, paid clergy mostly trained in Bible schools or those who had been associated with the founders had emerged, and the structure of administration became formalised with discernible hierarchy and line of authority. This denominationalisation indirectly aided the proliferation of independent Pentecostal organisations. From one group in May 1970, the movement grew to about ten organisations in 1974, and by the late 1980s, there were already over a thousand such groups. The number has since grown steadily to over five thousand independent groups by the new millennium.

By the late 1980s, the rise of Charismatic and Pentecostal movements was visible, and they could not be ignored because they were reshaping the religious landscape of Nigeria. By the 1990s, the movements had become a significant factor in Nigerian public life as the middle class, whose social stability has been decimated by the economic downturn, have found Pentecostal beliefs of prosperity as an alternative platform for social empowerment.

Pentecostal and Charismatic churches have proliferated in Nigeria since the mid-1970s in a wide range of types and sizes because of their modernising tendencies; their practices, which emphasise healings, miracles, and deliverance from Satanic bondages and malevolent forces; and material prosperity—a pragmatic approach to address specific existential issues

confronting Africans. Their emphasis on healing in various dimensions finds congruence with the traditional cosmology of overcoming evil in the Nigerian society. Equally important, the utilisation of the media and communication technologies have enabled these churches to repackage a new spirituality to reach a large audience of the educated middle class. By the early 1990s, the media had given much visibility to this new religious phenomenon when college-educated youths shifted their membership from the mainline Protestant churches to these new Pentecostal and Charismatic churches with dynamic worship services.

The Charismatic Renewal was almost an urban phenomenon, which was the best environment for sustaining a movement that relied heavily on the electronic and print media to gain membership. The use of literature such as magazines, tracts and booklets, aided the broader dissemination of charismatic spirituality in the country. Pentecostal rituals steeped in the English language, a global communication language, became the defining principle of the new religious phenomenon in the country. Besides, the utilisation of the print media and modern media technology has dramatically helped Pentecostal and Charismatic churches to widen their horizon and to conceive their mission in global terms.

The primary doctrinal emphasis has been on healing, often demonstrated with an extensive application. They insist that once Christians pray and have faith, healing must take place. Generally, Pentecostals and Charismatics focus on physical healing and on ‘casting out of demons’, which is termed deliverance. In recent years, another dimension that has developed is healing over socio-economic difficulties in life, termed ‘Success and Prosperity’. Lastly, there is healing over a nation’s political and socio-economic conditions, which is termed ‘Prayer for the Nations’. These definitions of healing have taken positive account of traditional causative factors of diseases as well as coming to terms with the dislocation of contemporary life. Moreover, Pentecostals and Charismatics have looked at illness as evil and have utilised the symbol of Satan to pinpoint social and religious tensions. These definitions thus have an explanatory function as well as an ethical dimension.

Pentecostals and Charismatics have also emphasised prosperity through which they have engineered personal empowerment and provided motivation for rapid upward social mobility. From the quest for personal material comfort, Pentecostals and Charismatics have moved to strengthen personal ambition from a rigorous biblical perspective. What sustains their apparent quest for material resources is partly the traditional African quest for well-being and wealth in all their ramifications. Therefore, they teach that it is sinful for Christians to be

poor; instead, everyone can and must enjoy abundance. Through this broad background, we can evaluate the Charismatics' worldview.

Thirdly, Charismatics insist that miracles, signs and wonders are part of the everyday experiences of Christians. Hence, Ademola Ishola and Travis Collins noted that they 'claim that evangelistic efforts, unless accompanied by signs and wonders, are incomplete and inadequate'.¹³ This obsession with miracles has dominated most camp meetings, Holy Ghost services, and evangelistic activities. Indeed. The quest for miracles has made Christianity to become utilitarian, always serving the interests and needs of Nigerians.

The Encounters of Nigerian Baptists with Pentecostalism

There were many avenues through which Pentecostal beliefs and practices seeped into Baptist churches from the mid-1970s. Among the discernible avenues were the television and radio broadcasts sponsored by Pentecostal organisations on main television and radio stations. For example, 'The Redemption Hour' hosted by Benson Idahosa's Church of God Mission was quite popular in the 1980s. On the radio, the Go Ye Evangelistic Association, under the leadership of Prophet Timothy Iyanda, a pastor of the Christ Apostolic Church in Lagos, was also popular from the 1970s as a radio evangelist. In addition, there were occasional open-air evangelistic meetings to which other Christian churches were invited to extend the Christian Gospel in the land. Evangelist J. K. Solomon of J. K. Solomon Evangelistic Association based in Ibadan and World Soul Winning Evangelistic Association (WOSEM) of Prophet Timothy Obadare were some of the prominent Pentecostals who moved about organising these open-air evangelism meetings called crusades. By the early 1980s, Deeper Christian Life Ministry, an independent Charismatic organisation led by the University teacher, William F. Kumuyi, was organising camp meetings with an offer of free food, accommodation and transportation. Of course, those who attended these religious events were amorphous but mostly Christians from the existing mainline Protestant churches.

An additional platform for the rapid spread of Pentecostalism into the mainline Protestant churches, including Baptist churches, was the Pentecostal literature that was sent into the country in the early 1970s by American Pentecostal televangelists such as T. L. Osborn, Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagin, Franklin Hall, etc. which were widely distributed within the literate communities of the

¹³ Travis Collins and Ademola Ishola, *Baptists and the Charismatic Movement* (Ibadan, Baptist Press, 1995, p. 47.

colleges and universities and were also widely read by the public. The emphases of testimonies of healing, deliverance from malevolent spiritual forces, and spiritual upliftment in the publications had a wide appeal to many evangelical Christians because these new religious emphases resonated with African traditional religious quest for the supernatural and the spectacular. The literature indirectly strengthened the doctrinal emphases and practices promoted in some of the camp meetings alluded to above.

By the mid-1980s, the breakfast meeting of the Full Gospel Businessmen Fellowship International (FGBMFI), an American-based Pentecostal organisation, had become popular among the educated elites in the capital cities and university towns in Nigeria.¹⁴ At each meeting organised over a communal breakfast, a leading professional would give testimony of his conversion experience or rededication of life to the audience. A constant theme by the speakers at the breakfast and lunch meetings was that the mainline Protestant churches could not offer any assistance when they were in spiritual crises until they encountered Pentecostal spirituality. The selective testimonies were sometimes bold, but they tended to de-emphasise affiliation to any existing mainline churches and uplift the Pentecostal experience. In some of these meetings, Baptists who had experienced renewed faith gave testimonies or participated enthusiastically in the FGBMFI. Although it claimed to be non-denominational, yet most speakers were Pentecostal leaders. Through such religious events, Pentecostal spirituality gradually moved into the mainstream of Christianity in the country.

Notwithstanding the above, a significant channel for the penetration of Pentecostal spirituality into Baptist churches was young adults who, from the late 1970s had been influenced by Charismatic Renewal on the campuses of colleges and universities, who later became active in their churches and who by the late 1980s, in some cases had entered the Baptist pastoral ministry. Several of these young adults in higher institutions belonged to the Baptist Student Fellowship (BSF) groups. Baptist Student Fellowship was established in 1958 from the missionary efforts of Southern Baptist Convention missionaries as an avenue for evangelical witness to students in colleges, polytechnics and universities. By the mid-1960s, the BSF became co-ordinated

¹⁴ Established by Demos Shakarin and his wife in the USA in 1952, it was first introduced to Nigeria in 1983, and grew among the middle and upper social classes. See *Full Gospel Business Men's Advance*, vol. 1, No. 4, Sept. 1991, pp. 1-8.

as more missionaries were evangelising among students in post-secondary institutions.¹⁵

Some of these students, upon graduation, became Baptist pastors. These Baptists perceived Pentecostal spirituality as a means of renewal in Baptist churches and hence promoted it strongly. This new religious culture was characterised acceptance of belief in the baptism of the Holy Spirit accompanied by speaking in tongues, emphasis on the teaching of prosperity as a reward for faith, and vigorous prayers for healing and deliverance. Worship services were marked by emotionalism with loud prayers, singing and dancing with the accompaniment of modern musical instruments.

Pentecostal Manifestations in Nigerian Baptist Churches

It was in the mid-1970s that the Charismatic Renewal reached its peak in the universities, where it influenced several students including Baptists. Thereafter, the Charismatic upsurge continued in various Baptist Student Fellowship groups, particularly in Southwestern Nigeria throughout the 1980s. Initially, conflicts regarding emphasis on the Pentecostal experience were localised to churches until about 1977, when some pastors began to complain about the leadership of the Baptist Student Fellowship as supportive of the Charismatic Renewal.¹⁶ Experiences such as crying while praying, open confession of sinful habits, and speaking in tongues were reported among some Baptist students. Some of these ‘excesses’ were attributed to Miss Mary Frank Kirkpatrick, a Southern Baptist missionary who was coordinating the Baptist student work and stationed in Southwestern Nigeria. Consequently, her expulsion from Nigeria by the Federal Government of Nigeria on 15 December 1977 in a general clampdown on Christian youth activities in the country¹⁷ was unconnected with her pervading influence among Baptists and Christian youths. Some parents felt that Miss Kirkpatrick did not act to confront the

¹⁵Baptist Mission of Nigeria 1964 Minutes, p. 84, Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary Library, Ogbomoso, Nigeria.

¹⁶ In Nigeria, the Charismatic Renewal started in the university campuses in January 1970, and by 1973 it had influenced many Christian students on the campuses. See Matthews A. Ojo, *The End Time Army: Charismatic Movements in Modern Nigeria* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2006).

¹⁷*Baptist Mission of Nigeria 1978/79 Minutes*, p. p. 48. Rev. Folu Soyawo, the General Secretary of Scripture Union, another Christian organisation for young people, was also detained in December 1977 for some days by Nigerian security services for undisclosed offences.

fanaticism that accompanied the Charismatic revival, which some Baptist students participated in.¹⁸

The problem of Baptist students' involvement with Pentecostalism was exacerbated in 1985 when BSF groups were established in local Baptist churches as part of an institutional change. Although this development guaranteed a steady membership for BSF groups in the colleges and universities, it nevertheless brought the Pentecostal influence closer to the churches and their pastors. By the late 1980s, some pastors were taking steps to ban BSF from operating or disallowing the hosting of BSF programmes in their churches because they were spreading 'unBaptistic' practices.

It was at this time that leaders of BSF began to curtail excesses among students and also to hold discussions with churches. Deaconess Bettye McQueen, a Southern Convention missionary and the national director of the Student Ministries, in 1989 issued the pamphlet *Does the Church Need BSF?* to explain the official position of the Department to churches and their pastors. She argued that setting up BSF both on campus and in the churches as a needed religious forum for all Baptist young people was a form of evangelical witness. In addition, Emiola Nihinlola, then the western zone co-ordinator of the Student Ministries and Dr Matthews A. Ojo, a leader of the BSF Alumni Association, made several visits to pastors and churches to plead for tolerance and acceptance of BSF members in their midst.

On the Convention level, in February 1990, Dr. S. T. Ola Akande, the General Secretary of the Convention, invited Mrs. A. Aderoju, a school principal and the Chairman of the Student Ministries Advisory Committee, to present a paper on Baptist Student Ministries work at the General Workers' Conference. The paper, which was well-written and well-received, provided a better understanding of the Pentecostal upsurge, mainly through the avenue of the BSF. However, no concrete policy was formulated from the discussion, hence controversy about Pentecostal spirituality continued.

In the Presidential address to the 77th annual session held in Kaduna in April 1990, Rev. D. H. Karo called on churches and conferences to accept BSF both in schools and churches.¹⁹ However, despite this official support, some associations and conferences acted panicky. They responded with a general

¹⁸ See Nigerian Baptist Convention, *Minutes of the Sixty-fifth Annual Session of the Nigerian Baptist Convention* (Ibadan, 1978), p. 19.

¹⁹ Presidential Address read by Rev. D. H. Karo. See Nigerian Baptist Convention, *Minutes of the 77th Annual Session of the Nigerian Baptist Convention* (Ibadan, 1990).

condemnation of the Pentecostal spirituality in any form—whether it was noticed within BSF or found among some other Baptists.

By the early 1990s, some pastors and churches had increased their opposition to BSF tremendously. Hence, issues of all-night prayer meetings, deliverance services, casting out of demons, and ‘slaying in the Spirit’ were reported to Convention leaders as unbaptistic activities. Indeed, some of these allegations were true, but many Baptist pastors failed to realise the overwhelming influence of the Charismatic Renewal on the campuses on these students. Second, it was impossible for the Baptist Student Ministries headquarters to monitor every Baptist student active in the Baptist Student Fellowship on the campuses.

Nevertheless, the leadership of the Student Ministries wrote out some basic Baptist beliefs and practices as a small pamphlet for students.²⁰ The pamphlet included the experience of baptism of the Holy Spirit explained from the evangelical perspective. This was the first systematic attempt to approach the Pentecostal upsurge among Baptist students, though coming relatively late.

About 1992, the Executive Committee of Oyo West Baptist Conference issued guidelines regarding what were considered unBaptistic practices in a booklet titled ‘*Baptist Beliefs and Practices*’ and published in English and Yoruba for wider dissemination. That Pentecostal experiences and practices informed the publication was reflected in its introduction, which read in part:

The reason why the Executive Committee embarked on this exercise is due to various occasional allegations and accusations by some Baptist youth and adults that worship services in Baptist churches are very lukewarm. They have alleged that our prayers are weak and not ‘hot enough’. They said we do not heal the sick or raise the dead. They have also alleged that in Baptist churches, miracles do not happen and people are not baptised by the Holy Spirit neither they are able to speak in tongues. ...But surprising enough many of these people still stay in the Baptist Churches and insist on forcing these Pentecostal beliefs on members.²¹

Although the Executive Committee gave very moderate evangelical positions on certain Pentecostal beliefs and practices, it went to the extreme in its comments on ‘Night Vigils’ and, in a very caustic manner, asked all churches and individuals holding night vigils to cease such immediately. Likewise, some

²⁰ Student Ministries Department Nigerian Baptist Convention, *Doctrinal Statement and Guide* (Ibadan, 1990).

²¹ Executive Committee, Oyo West Baptist Conference, *Baptist Beliefs and Practices* (Ibadan, c. 1992), p. 1.

associational moderators and pastors took it upon themselves even to pontificate on what they knew little about.

It is necessary to ask what actually were those beliefs and practices described as unBaptistic and upon which the controversies centred. Indeed, it is difficult to say because opinions varied depending on the person's background and Christian maturity. Nevertheless, the Oyo West Baptist Conference, in its publication, listed the following:

- a. Shouting during prayers as if God were deaf.
- b. Foot stamping and fingers snapping at prayers sessions followed by sentimental responses like 'Yes, it shall be done', 'you must do it', 'Jesus', etc.
- c. Weeping and rolling on the ground during prayers.
- d. Holding separate prayer meetings while the church is holding one in the sanctuary.
- e. Hosting of Night vigils, i.e. prayer meetings held in the night from about 10.00 pm till 5.00 am.
- f. Praying for the gifts of the Holy Spirit so that one can speak in tongues as it happened on the day of Pentecost to the Apostles.²²

To the above, the following were added:

1. Any affirmation of baptism of the Holy Spirit as a post-conversion experience.
2. Speaking in tongues and any demonstration of that belief.
3. Moving about or jerking or throwing hands about while praying.
4. Shouting 'Halleluyah' and or 'Praise the Lord' during worship services or prayer meetings.
5. Claims of seeing visions or having prophecies.
6. Belief in and the practice of deliverance from what are perceived as satanic agents and demons.
7. Believing all the time that calling on the name of Jesus can effect physical healing.
8. Any emphasis placed on the 'End Time' or the events that will herald the 'End Time'.

²² Executive Committee, Oyo West Baptist Conference, *Baptist Beliefs and Practices* (Ibadan, c. 1992), p. 7.

9. Any semblance of deep devotion beyond the ordinary.
10. Spasmodic interjections of phrases such as ‘Praise the Lord’, ‘God bless you’, ‘Amen’, ‘the blood of Jesus’ God is good, etc, while worship is going on.
11. Excessive use of choruses to the neglect of hymns.
12. Attending and participating in programmes organised by Pentecostal churches and ministries.
13. Not wearing of earrings, necklaces, bangles or costly dressing from a religious conviction or piety.
14. Dressing in a particular mode depicting certain religious inclinations.
15. Laying on of hands as means of blessing or effecting ‘anointing’.
16. Belief in ‘slaying under the anointing of the Spirit’.
17. Anointing people with oil or using anointed handkerchiefs or water as a ritual formula.
18. Any deep devotion to miracles, signs and wonders or any expectation of such.²³

The above listings clearly indicate that any objective approach would have been difficult, as some practices could not be considered undesirable or unbiblical. Although some of these practices have now been accepted as biblical, nevertheless, in the 1980s, they were thorny issues. In fact, a report from the Oyo East Conference in about 1992 went as far as imposing a ban on starting any prayer with ‘In Jesus’ Name’ or shouting ‘Praise the Lord’ or ‘Halleluyah’ too often!²⁴

Furthermore, lacking any precise definition, by the late 1980s, a new offence called ‘unbaptistic practices’ was created at association, conference and Convention levels. Under this rubric, some Baptists and certain individuals were charged. Perhaps the most exciting case associated with the upsurge of Pentecostal spirituality and Baptist identity was in connection with three churches: Orita Mefa Baptist Church, Ibadan, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Ibadan and Oworonsoki Baptist Church, Lagos. It was reported in the *Book of Reports of 1986* that two churches, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Ibadan and Oworonsoki Baptist Church, were de-fellowshipped from their various associations due to

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ The decision of the Oyo East Baptist Conference was widely reported in several churches in Ogbomoso in 1992 and 1993.

unBaptistic practices, which were really Pentecostal practices.²⁵ As reported to the Ministerial Board in 1985, such unbaptistic practices included ‘wailing, crying during worship, and dancing during thanksgiving!’²⁶ It was the case of the Orita Mefa Baptist Church that was most celebrated.

Orita Mefa Baptist Church was founded by Southern Baptist missionaries in the early 1957 and pastored as an English-speaking Baptist church in the city of Ibadan for the educated middle class. Its proximity to the premier university in the country, the University of Ibadan, attracted to the membership many young persons, some of whom were students and young graduates. Within the church, there existed an evangelistic group, ‘the Gospel Group’, founded in the early 1970s, whose membership was primarily students, young professionals and young graduates. By the mid-1970s, this group, though never openly identified as Pentecostal, was already harbouring members who had been influenced by the Charismatic Renewal and were already sympathetic to Pentecostalism. Aided by inspirations provided by a Southern Baptist missionary working among students who were worshipping regularly in the Church, the group grew in strength, and this was demonstrated with many successful outreaches. The minister of the Church, Rev. Samuel M. Leigh, was popular with the group and the youth because he had been a Charismatic from his student years in the college in the early 1970s.

In November 1986, the Ministerial Board considered the report by the General Secretary that some members within the Church had in 1985 reported that some unbaptistic practices were going on in the church with the active support of the pastor, Rev. S. M. Leigh. Despite the success of the church in terms of its evangelism and church planting, and as one of the major financial contributors to the Nigerian Baptist Convention’s co-operative programme, some Baptist leaders felt that the church should be brought to book. Unfortunately, a report of a committee set up to investigate the matter was judged by the Board to be inconclusive. The intervention of the Ibadan Baptist Association to settle the matter did not curb those Pentecostal tendencies until the church and its pastor were threatened with withdrawal of fellowship from the Nigerian Baptist Convention.

This issue caused much dissatisfaction among members of the Ministerial Board and the leadership of the Convention. While some were sympathetic to the Church on the grounds that it was singled out of malice, others felt that

²⁵ Nigerian Baptist Convention, *Book of Reports, 1986* (Ibadan, 1986), p. 29

²⁶ Nigerian Baptist Convention, *Book of Reports, 1986* (Ibadan, 1986), p. 29.

there was merit in the case to decide on. Because of the emotional fervour the case generated, only a few were aware that there was no legal basis to discipline a church which continued to claim to be Baptist and was fully supportive of the co-operative programme of the Convention. Indeed, the issue bordered on religious practices; the matter called into question the issue of Baptists' self-understanding in the face of other Christian practices. The attackers of Orita Mefa Baptist Church insisted that the Baptist faith could not accept Pentecostal spirituality if Baptist distinctiveness were to be maintained. On the other hand, supporters of Orita Mefa Baptist Church emphasised that the church has always defined itself as Baptist and has been one of the six major contributors to the cooperative programme of the Convention. Although the case was later dropped in early 1987, when the matter was amicably resolved through dialogue between the Church and the Ibadan Baptist Association, there has been a sensitivity to Baptist identity from then on.

The controversy over Pentecostal spirituality placed the issue of Baptist identity in the front burners event till the late 1990s. Interestingly, by the new millennium, Baptist identity in Nigeria included Pentecostal spirituality as it was in the 1980s and 1990s. This change in the perception of denominational identity occurred as more college and university graduates entered the pastoral ministry, eventually leading churches that became vibrant and more successful financially and evangelistically.

Responses of Nigerian Baptists to Pentecostal Spirituality

The official response to the Pentecostal upsurge was never coordinated; hence, panicky measures were adopted to curtail the spread of the revival. With hindsight, various leaders in the Associations, Conferences and Convention levels needed to appreciate the Charismatic Renewal as a revivalist ethos. At the same time, some did not consider change as necessary for religious progress.

Generally, the response of Nigerian Baptists to the Pentecostal upsurge passed through three phases, and each epoch revealed certain peculiarities of that age. First, throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s, the response was antagonism and opposition to Pentecostal spirituality by most Baptist leaders (deacons, pastors, associations and Convention's leaders) on the grounds that Pentecostal spirituality was not compatible with Baptist beliefs and practices. In this regard, conflicts and controversies about Pentecostal upsurge within BSF and in some churches have already been discussed in previous sections.

From the mid-1990s, the posture gradually changed to tolerance because Pentecostalism had grown and become famous, and some Baptist pastors had been influenced by it. Nevertheless, some opposition to Pentecostalism still existed, and some conflicts were witnessed in some Baptist churches. For example, there were splits in two Baptist churches in Lagos, and one of the schismatic groups, The Upper Room Baptist Church, seceded from the Nigerian Baptist Convention to remain an independent Baptist denomination with a robust Pentecostal orientation. In other cases, some seceding groups retained their membership in the Nigerian Baptist Convention. Consequently, by the mid-1990s, Pentecostal influences had gone beyond the BSF constituency and were becoming a broader phenomenon, to the dismay of some conservative pastors.

In contrast to the extreme position of the Oyo West Conference already discussed, two books were published that tried to promote tolerance and understanding. Travis Collins and Ademola Ishola, *Baptists and the Charismatic Movement* (Ibadan, Baptist Press, 1995) and Emiola Nihinlola, *Nigerian Baptist Convention and Pentecostal-Charismatic Worship Practices* (1995) gave objective analyses of the Pentecostal and Charismatic awakening. Travis Collins was a Southern Baptist missionary teaching Church History at the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, and Ademola Ishola held a doctoral degree in Theology from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas. At the same time, Emiola Nihinlola was then the Western Zone BSF co-ordinator. These books cover many aspects such as corporate worship, including prayers, fasting, speaking in tongues, emotional shouting of “Praise the Lord”, testimonies, Night Vigils, singing choruses, laying on of hands and deliverance. Nihinlola concluded that since Nigerian Baptist youths had a strong sympathy and appreciation for the Pentecostal worship practices and are active members of Baptist churches, it would be inappropriate to continue to describe such practices as ‘unBaptistic’ mainly since it appears that the impact of the Charismatic Renewal on the denomination has been positive. Despite these informed positions from two theologians and a Student Minister, the Convention failed to adopt any official position and left the matter to churches, associations, and conferences. Indeed, in some churches, Pentecostal spirituality caused further divisions and schisms.

The most popular Baptist preacher who brought some understanding to Pentecostal beliefs in an acceptable evangelical manner was Yusufu Obaje, then a lecturer and later President of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso and the Nigerian Baptist Convention. With a doctoral degree in Systematic Theology from the University of Edinburgh, UK and his

own evangelical conviction, he took the opportunity of the controversy over the Pentecostal upsurge to publish certain books explaining some Pentecostal beliefs and practices from the evangelical position.²⁷ Looking back, Yusufu Obaje towed a middle-course approach of acceptance to the generality of pastors and the Charismatics.

Thirdly, by the new millennium, the response had moved from antagonism to toleration and finally acceptance of Pentecostal spirituality from the realisation that certain aspects of Pentecostalism could be utilised as a tool for church growth. Gradually, over time, Pentecostal spirituality was accepted, and some of its elements were incorporated into worship services in Baptist churches. An institutional change came in 1993 when the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, under the presidency of Yusufu Obaje, introduced the three-year Master of Divinity programme, and this change was strengthened in 1996 when it introduced the same ministerial training course as a part-time sandwich programme. These programmes provided opportunities for many graduates with first degrees to be trained as Baptist pastors. Before then, the Seminary offered only the three-year Diploma in Theology and the four-year Bachelor in Theology programmes, which were not attractive to university graduates. Most of those admitted into the Master of Divinity programme were former members of the BSF, and some had been influenced by Charismatic Renewal on the campuses. This group of students, whom the churches had complained about as peddling unbaptistic practices, soon became the vanguard for the rejuvenation of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. By the late 1990s, these M.Div. graduates were exercising successful ministries in their churches. Membership of their churches rose considerably, there was demonstrable spiritual alertness and commitment, and the financial contributions of their churches were enormous and challenging to the generality of Baptists. In the churches where they served, it was not long before Pentecostal fervour subtly crept into these churches. Since these churches grew rapidly, had more committed members, and became more active in the Convention, Conferences and Associations, the label of ‘unBaptistic practices’ soon dropped out of use. Though never documented, Pentecostal spirituality and awareness of renewal have largely sustained this spiritual awakening in Baptist churches pastored by

²⁷ The books are: Obaje, Ameh Yusufu. *Concerning Prayer, Fasting and Night Vigil*. (Ogbomoso: Ogunniyi Publishers, 1993). Obaje, Ameh Yusufu. *The Miracle of Deliverance*. (Ogbomoso: Bezekos Printing Press, 1990). Obaje, Ameh Yusufu. *The Miracle of Speaking in Tongues*. (Ogbomoso: Adebayo Calvary Printers, 1987). Obaje, Ameh Yusufu. *Have You Received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit?* (Ogbomoso: Adebayo Calvary Printers, 1986).

M.Div. graduates or by others who have had equivalent contacts with Charismatic Renewal.

To this end, there was an expansion of space in many Baptist churches to accommodate Pentecostal spirituality with the aim of retaining the youth, women and others who had already adjusted to Pentecostalism through earlier participation in Pentecostal activities, particularly on the campuses of universities and colleges. The position then shifted to acceptance of Pentecostal spirituality as many Baptist churches adopted the contemporary free liturgy characteristic of Pentecostal worship. Some pastors also adopted Pentecostal practices such as display of emotionalism in worship services, noisy prayers, greater emphasis on healing and deliverance, and sometimes extending invitations to Pentecostal pastors and freelance evangelists to lead revival or special services. More visible was that some prominent Baptist pastors began to use the anointing oil within worship services – for healing, blessing and other self-serving purposes.

Eventually, by the late 1990s, worship in some Baptist churches had changed so much that some of the things earlier condemned as unBaptistic practices became acceptable. With the benefit of hindsight, Emiola Nihinlola was probably right when, in reference to the sweeping Charismatic Renewal, he recommended as follows: ‘Don’t Ignore It, Don’t Reject it, Don’t Adopt It, Study It, Moderate It, and Experience It’.²⁸ He added that while the BSF is not a Pentecostal organisation, the organisation was responding positively to what he called ‘the move of the Spirit biblically and practically’, and that pastors and churches trying to stop Pentecostalism were wasting their time.²⁹

The key person who took advantage of this new development for Baptist growth is Dr. Ademola Ishola, who trained in missiology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, USA, and who spent his youth in the Yoruba Diaspora communities in Ghana. Upon his election as the General Secretary in 2001, he adopted the motto ‘Empowering Churches for Kingdom Growth’ to mobilise the churches. In addition, he carried out a restructuring of the programme of the annual general session of the Convention. The traditional emphasis on debates and taking of reports during business meetings was retained from 8.00 a.m. till 4.00 p.m. each day. However, Dr. Ishola introduced evening programmes³⁰ consisting of large open services with singing and dancing, sermons and ministration for healing

²⁸ Emiola Nihinlola, *A Biblical Evaluation of Pentecostalism* (Ibadan, Sceptre Prints, 1998), pp. 19-22.

²⁹ Emiola Nihinlola, ‘The BSF Vision (Part III)’ *The Nigerian Baptist*, March 1997, p. 11.

³⁰ These were usually held from 5.00 p.m. to 8.00 p.m. each day.

that are characteristic of Pentecostal churches. After the message which often lasted about 45 minutes, there was a time for ‘ministration’, when the preacher would pray for healing and deliverance for those who have come forward for such prayers. Never before were such practices allowed in Baptist services until the new millennium. The Pentecostal fervour in these services was glaring, and within two years, the success of the innovation was widely reported and thus attracted more Baptists and others to the evening programme. Indeed, Ishola’s innovation brought a renewal to the Baptist faith from that era.

In fact, it was in worship that Pentecostalism greatly influenced the Baptist faith in Nigeria. First, worship services gradually were characterised by emotionalism, with loud singing, dancing, and shouting as a form of praise, with the accompaniment of modern musical instruments, praying aloud, and giving ‘prophetic declarations’ in worship services. Other Pentecostal influences in Baptist services included speaking in tongues, the use of anointing oil, widespread use of imprecatory prayers, and singing choruses became more pronounced though traditional Christian hymns were not abandoned, some pastors encouraged worshippers to ‘pray in tongues’ to enhance spirituality, and the emphasis on the teaching of prosperity as a reward for faith was incorporated. More importantly, healing and deliverance services were regularly organised in some Baptist churches. Giving testimonies became a regular feature in worship and prayer meetings, and some of these testimonies were published and circulated on social media platforms. Indeed, certain aspects of this new spirituality contrasted sharply with the substantive conservative evangelical spirituality brought into the continent through Western missionary endeavours.

These elemental changes in the Baptist faith constituted what Randy Arnett, a deceased Southern Baptist missionary in Africa, has termed ‘pentecostalization’. Arnett studied the pentecostalization of Baptist churches in West Africa from a missiological perspective and concluded that ‘rarely do I find a church that has not incorporated Neo-Pentecostal practices and beliefs to some degree’.³¹

By the beginning of the new millennium, only the most conservative Baptist churches had not been influenced by Pentecostalism in one way or another, though all still claimed to be firmly Baptist. At the same time, BSF church-based groups expanded greatly and continued to sustain a revivalist ethos within the denomination. As opposition lessened, worship services in Baptist

³¹ Arnett, Randy. *Pentecostalization: The Evolution of Baptists in Africa* (Eldon, MO: Randy Arnett, 2017), pp. ix-x.

churches were rejuvenated and restructured to accommodate new changes. Eventually, the Charismatic Renewal and its accompanying Pentecostal spirituality became symbols of change within an evangelical milieu.

Conclusion

The preceding discussions have shown how, in various debates and controversies, Nigerian Baptists have understood their denominational identity in the context of the upsurge of Pentecostalism and its intrusion into Baptist churches in Nigeria. Generally, Nigerian Baptists have dealt more with methodological issues of their faith rather than theological controversies, partly because the Pentecostal upsurge involved largely the laity and then pastors. For the laypeople, religious experience was prioritized over doctrinal distinctives. Consequently, the actors or combatants have all tried to maintain the evangelical faith but from different modes of experience. Although, in some instances, Baptist heritage was eroded, Pentecostal spirituality has eventually contributed to growth in many Baptist churches because of its lively worship and a theology that grapples with human existential needs. Pentecostal spirituality has shown how religious experience plays a crucial role in the life and thoughts of a denomination. Pentecostal movements have laid a new emphasis on spontaneous oral expression, and thus, they are answering the contemporary need for experience and authenticity. Nevertheless, the religious experience contrasts sharply with the substantive conservative evangelical spirituality of deep theological thinking, which has characterised Baptist theology since the seventeenth century. The dilemma of maintaining a rational theological tradition or exalting religious experience above other things has caused the need to redefine the Baptist identity.

Charismatic Renewal has greatly impacted many denominations and the Nigerian Baptist Convention. As a renewal movement, it is a religion that calls for intense religious experience, and calls attention to the texts of the Scriptures. It is still spreading across many denominations partly because its doctrinal emphases are contextually relevant to the contemporary situation facing millions of Nigerians. While it has become the vehicle for renewal in some churches, it has also been the cause of conflict and misunderstanding in many others. Clearly, it is a movement that cannot be stopped, nor can it be curtailed. The best approach then is that of tolerance.

In opposition to the Charismatic Renewal, Baptist pastors were at the forefront; likewise, in accepting the new spirituality, a few Baptist pastors were bold enough to come out and identify with the growing new Christianity.

Eventually, the Charismatic Renewal and its accompanying Pentecostal spirituality became symbols of change within an evangelical milieu. While there was some organisational ineptness within the Convention, the actors promoting change were purposely, and their inputs have partly resulted in the present Baptist faith, which could sustain evangelicalism into the twenty-first century.

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