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'Anglocostalism' in Nigeria: Neo-Pentecostalism and Obstacles to Anglican Unity

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ABSTRACT

In the last several decades, the religious landscape in Nigeria has been transformed by the rise of neo-Pentecostal or 'new generation' churches. These churches teach a gospel of prosperity, advance an oppositional view of the world, focus on a supernatural arena of spiritual forces, accord a unique weight to the Bible, and practice a charismatic worship style. One result of the presence of these churches has been to change the face of Anglicanism in Nigeria. Concerned about the possibility of diminished influence and prestige, the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) has responded to neo-Pentecostal churches by adopting more of its rivals' beliefs and practices. This paper argues that this changing environment explains, in part, Nigerian opposition to efforts at global Anglican unity and argues that it is impossible to address the future of the Anglican Communion without first understanding the on-the-ground religious context in Nigeria.

KEYWORDS: Anglican Communion, charismatic, neo-Pentecostalism, Nigeria, Pentecostalism, prosperity gospel

'When I was first ordained', the archdeacon in a large, eastern Nigerian diocese told me, 'we young clergy were praying for bishops who would allow us to worship in charismatic ways. Twenty years ago, only a handful of bishops allowed that. Now, practically all of them do.' The change in church leadership is changing church practice, he said: 'If the Pentecostals are singing and dancing around, let us do that too. Let the pastor jump around. Let us change the liturgy.' The comments, made during a recent month-long research trip, reveal a

1. Jesse Zink is a doctoral student in theology and assistant chaplain at Emmanuel College, Cambridge.

central truth about the current state of Anglicanism in one of its largest provinces: the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), along with other mainline denominations in Nigeria and across Africa, has responded to the rapid growth of neo-Pentecostal churches by adopting attributes of those churches. The result has been significant changes to traditional patterns of worship, belief, and doctrine that have made Anglicans more like the neo-Pentecostal 'competition'. With no hyperbole, an Anglican bishop could refer to his church as 'Anglocostal' and call the prosperity gospel – a central feature of the neo-Pentecostal movement – a 'virus that is taking over the church'.

These dramatic changes have received significant attention from Nigerian religious scholars but little in the Western academy. At a time of division in the Anglican Communion, this failure to reckon with the nature of Anglicanism in Nigeria is particularly regrettable and poses an obstacle to Anglican unity. This paper – rooted in the work of Nigerian academics, similar experiences by mainline denominations in other parts of Africa, and my own interviews and experience in the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)² – seeks to begin to bridge this gap between Nigerian and Western academics and church members. The paper first briefly explores the recent and explosive growth of so-called 'new generation' churches in Nigeria that is rooted in a revival of the late 1960s and accelerated and changed beginning in the 1980s. The paper then traces the initially negative responses of mainline denominations – including the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) – to the new churches. The third section is the heart of the paper, exploring how the initial policies of exclusion and rejection evolved into accommodation and imitation: worship has changed, there is a greater emphasis on healing, an increased recognition of a supernatural world, a tendency towards seeing the world in binary terms, more common references to prosperity gospel theology, and a different understanding of the authority of the Bible. These changes amount to a profound re-shaping of Anglicanism in the Nigerian context. The paper concludes by speculating that the Nigerian church's current opposition to dialogue within the Anglican Communion is one result of this 'Anglocostalization' and posits that discussions about the future of the Anglican Communion are incomplete without considering the religious environment in which Nigerian Anglican

2. The research for this paper was conducted in June 2011 in four Anglican dioceses in eastern and northern Nigeria. Quotations are verbatim and taken from notes made during approximately 35 interviews over the course of the month.

leaders operate. The paper, thus, is meant as an initial foray into a greater understanding of the forces that shape the expression of Anglicanism in Nigeria and, by extension, around the world.

The Rise of 'New Generation' Churches

Spend a little time in any Nigerian city and one will quickly see advertisements and signboards for churches, especially the neo-Pentecostal or – to call them by the name often used by Nigerians – 'new generation' churches that have flourished in the country in recent decades: 'The River of Life International Ministries: The Church on Fire' or, more simply, 'International Praise Church'.³ The church names contrast with those of the mainline denominations, such as 'St. Silas Anglican Church, Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)'.⁴ The competing signs testify to the multiplicity of forms of Christianity in Nigeria. While a complete taxonomy of churches in Nigeria is beyond the purposes of this paper, in this section I briefly trace the emergence of neo-Pentecostalism in Nigeria and outline some of the elements most commonly associated with the movement – including its worship, emphasis on a gospel of prosperity, focus on a supernatural world, dismissal of other Christians, and the authority placed on the Bible – and show, in some measure, how these elements differ from what mainline denominations have historically believed.

Although some elements of late nineteenth-century African Christian movements show elements of what has been called 'pneumatic' Christianity, Pentecostalism as such had its start in the

3. The terminology applied to religious movements and denominations in Nigeria is widely variable. In this paper, following Ayegboyin and Ukah, I call the denominations established by foreign missionaries – including the Anglican church – 'mainline' and occasionally 'historic'. Classifying Pentecostal churches is notoriously difficult and it would distract from the purpose of this paper to spend time investigating the multiplicity of Pentecostals. Again following Ayegboyin and Ukah, I most frequently use the phrase 'neo-Pentecostal' or 'charismatic' to describe this 'conglomeration of a wide variety of assemblies with equally astonishing flurry of doctrines and practices'. Deji Ayegboyin and F.K. Asonzeh Ukah, 'Taxonomy of Churches in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective', *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies*, 34.1-2 (2002), pp. 68–86 (72–73, 84–85). See also Damaris Seleina Parsitau, 'From the Periphery to the Centre: The Pentecostalisation of Mainline Christianity in Kenya', *Missionalia*, 35.3 (2007), pp. 83–111 (88). For what it is worth, Nigerian Anglicans seem to know they are referring to this broad movement of churches when they use the phrase 'new generation'.

4. Although often called the 'Anglican Church of Nigeria', the official name of the Nigerian Anglican province is 'Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)'.

early twentieth century in the United States. Participants in the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles practiced a new form of Christianity, claiming direct inspiration from the Holy Spirit. As new churches took shape, they sent missionaries to many African countries. Pentecostalism interacted with burgeoning African Initiated Christian churches in a variety of complex ways that are beyond the scope of this paper. The result, however, is that by the time Nigeria gained its independence in 1960, Pentecostal forms of Christianity had gradually become a part – though by no means a dominant one – of the Nigerian religious landscape. These early churches – some started by American denominations and others unique to Nigeria – were relatively ‘tame’ in comparison to the later neo-Pentecostal movement, emphasizing, for instance, baptism by the Spirit and speaking in tongues as evidence of that baptism.⁵

The situation began to change dramatically during and following the Nigerian civil war of 1967 to 1970. A full-fledged evangelical revival, originating among students in university Christian organizations, came to life, spurred into existence by the war’s ‘disastrous impact [which] led many to look for new spiritual possibilities’.⁶ Student groups like the Scripture Union, a non-denominational evangelical group, were ‘radicalized’ by the war and established cell groups based, in part, on charismatic practice.⁷ The university system, a creation of the post-independence period, reached critical mass in the 1970s. Through cross-university contacts and the shared experience of trauma, the revival movements began to spread across the country.⁸ Importantly, this movement emerged from the mainline denominations. Ojo’s research into this period demonstrates how the largest percentage of members of the new revival organizations had a background in the Anglican church.⁹ Soon, the ‘presence and activities of young puritan preachers became noticeable and annoying to leaders of mainline churches’.¹⁰ Some parted

5. Ayegboyin and Ukah, ‘Taxonomy of Churches in Nigeria’, pp. 80–82. Kalu’s book-length study *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) refers to the period from 1900 to the 1960s as that of ‘early charismatic movements’.

6. Joel B. Kailing, ‘A New Solution to the African Christian Problem’, *Missiology: An International Review*, 22.4 (1994), pp. 489–506 (494).

7. Ogbu U. Kalu, ‘Pentecostalism and Mission in Africa, 1970–2000’, *Mission Studies*, 24 (2007), pp. 9–45 (12).

8. Matthews A. Ojo, *The End-Time Army: Charismatic Movements in Modern Nigeria* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2006), p. 233.

9. Ojo, *End-Time Army*, p. 177.

10. Kalu, ‘Pentecostalism and Mission in Africa’, p. 10.

ways from the mainline denominations and began their own churches, some of which are now among Nigeria's largest.

The economic decline and collapse in Nigeria of the 1980s and 1990s furthered the growth of these new religious movements and changed their nature. When oil prices collapsed, so too did the Nigerian economy, leading to huge unemployment.¹¹ That, combined with growing corruption among political leaders and dictatorial misrule, led to a 'large army of economically disempowered citizenry... [The] situation of near state break-up was the backcloth against which these "new wave" Pentecostal structures sprouted and proliferated.'¹² The movements, an evolved form of some of the churches that had emerged from the revival a decade and a half earlier, responded to a situation of uncertainty and economic trauma with spiritual and rhetorical power. They 'appear[ed] to be matching force with force by applying spiritual and physical warfare. In its war against the spiritual forces perceived to be responsible for the socio-economic problems facing the country, spiritual battle rhetoric ... [was] employed in the most frenzied and ecstatic manner. Pentecostalism thus appear[ed] to be a solution to the myriad problems facing the Nigerian populace.'¹³ This was in sharp contrast to the mainline denominations, which had a reputation for seeing corrupt practices yet standing by and maintaining silence.¹⁴

One aspect of the intensification of the revival moment in the 1980s and 1990s is the growing influence of American and European televangelists and preachers. People like Jim and Tammy Bakker, Pat Robertson, Jimmy Swaggart, and others began to work more closely with African Christian leaders, including in Nigeria.¹⁵ One result was

11. Adoyi Onoja, 'The Pentecostal Churches: The Politics of Spiritual Deregulation since the 1980s', in Julius O. Adekunle (ed.), *Religion in Politics: Secularism and National Integration in Modern Nigeria* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2009), pp. 263–73 (263).

12. Asonzeh F.K. Ukah, 'Contesting God: Nigerian Pentecostals and their Relations with Islam and Muslims', in David Westerlund (ed.), *Global Pentecostalism Encounters with Other Religious Traditions* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), pp. 93–114 (99).

13. Celestina O. Isiramen, 'Pentecostalism and the Nigerian Socio/Economic Debacle: A Therapy or a Delusion?', in Celestina O. Isiramen, Friday J. Imaekhai, and Benson O. Igboin (eds.), *Religion and the Nigerian Nation: Some Topical Issues*. (Ibadan, Nigeria: En-Joy Press, 2010), p. 303.

14. Matthews A. Ojo, 'The Charismatic/Pentecostal Experience in Nigeria', *Journal of African Christian Thought* 2.1 (1999), pp. 3–16 (26).

15. Paul Gifford, 'Prosperity: A New and Foreign Element in African Christianity', *Religion*, 20 (1990), pp. 373–88 (374).

that these new religious movements began to preach what is often called the 'prosperity gospel'. Such teachings stress not other-worldly concerns but 'realities of everyday life like health, fertility, success and material goods'.¹⁶ Preachers are heard to tell their congregations that 'God does not want you to be poor' and that followers of Christ are to be rich in this life. A 'negative confession of poverty should not come out a child of God. Please say you are rich', says one pastor cited by Isiramen.¹⁷ There is perceived to be a close connection between the success of a church and its members on the one hand and the adequacy and orthodoxy of its teaching on the other.

The story sketched here is the briefest of overviews of part of a nation's complex religious history. For instance, one important aspect of Nigerian Christianity not traced here is the influence of evangelicalism and the rise of a non-charismatic but equally fervent religious movement out of the same post-civil war revival. Still, it is clear that by the first decade of the twenty-first century – forty years after the Biafran War and a century after Pentecostalism first began in the United States – a new religious movement has taken shape in Nigeria. While it is rooted in historical understandings of Pentecostalism, it is both new and strikingly different to the mainline denominations which have dominated the religious scene for generations, and has characteristics that overlap with evangelicalism in the church. It is 'more appropriately called neo-Pentecostalism ... [because it] combines elements from classical Pentecostalism ... with accommodation with the world'.¹⁸

Like all Pentecostal churches, worship is a distinguishing characteristic. The Holy Spirit is believed to be present and enlivening worship in a dramatic way. The result is a 'lively, cathartic liturgy'.¹⁹ A 'praise and worship team', often using amplified instruments, leads 'exuberant and exhilarating' music.²⁰ Preaching is central to the worship and powerfully delivered by the pastor. Glossolalia is seen as the manifestation of the Spirit among believers and is particularly prized. The worship in these churches is notably different to that inherited from foreign missionaries in mainline denominations, which often stressed non-extemporaneous prayers and non-spontaneous liturgies.

The new generation churches focus on a supernatural world that is very real to many Nigerians. Indeed, Kailing goes so far as to link

16. Gifford, 'Prosperity: A New and Foreign Element', p. 383.

17. Isiramen, 'Pentecostalism and the Nigerian Socio/Economic Debacle', p. 320.

18. Ukah, 'Contesting God', p. 98.

19. Kalu, 'Pentecostalism and Mission in Africa', p. 30.

20. Parsitau, 'From the Periphery to the Centre', p. 100.

many attributes of Pentecostalism – worship, strong preaching, intensive prayer – to its claim ‘to transform the world ... through a demonstration of spiritual power in the face of a world which is teeming with supernatural forces, most of them at odds with the kingdom of God’.²¹ Such a view is the result of combining traditional beliefs in supernatural forces with the theology of American and European evangelists who see the world in sharply binary terms: ‘God and Satan are at war everywhere. Everything is a manifestation of that battle. A Christian’s life is one of spiritual warfare. In everything we are fighting spiritual powers. They are everywhere.’²² Conversion to Christianity thus becomes equivalent to liberating people from ‘the grip of evil spirits, witches, forces of darkness, principalities, enemies, bad luck and repeated failures, all prevalent in the African world view’.²³ Such preaching and teaching contrasts sharply with the historic understandings taught by the mainline denominations, which have in the past ‘de-emphasized, if admitted at all’ the existence of supernatural forces²⁴ and been seen as ‘largely rational and cerebral’²⁵ and focused on ‘just the soul’.²⁶

An important feature of the early years of the new generation churches was their dismissal of the faith of the mainline denominations. An Anglican bishop, remembering that era, told me, ‘When the Pentecostals began preaching, they said, “Anglicans and Catholics are going to hell” and that our pastors are “dead pastors.” People said, “How can we be in church and go to hell?” and joined their churches.’ The neo-Pentecostal movement is marked by a larger strain of anti-clericalism. New generation preachers describe trained clergy as being ‘blinded by Satan with “book knowledge” [who] cannot grasp the essence of the Holy Spirit. The non-pentecostal pastor is often described either as an “Eli” or compromiser of the truth.’²⁷ Such thinking was no doubt influenced by the international

21. Kailing, ‘A New Solution’, p. 501.

22. Paul Gifford, ‘Reinhard Bonnke’s Mission to Africa, and his 1991 Nairobi Crusade’, in *New Dimensions in African Christianity* (Ibadan: Sefer, 1993), pp. 186–215 (194).

23. Ojo, ‘The Charismatic/Pentecostal Experience in Nigeria’, p. 29.

24. Kailing, ‘A New Solution’, p. 491.

25. J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, ‘Neo-Pentecostalism and the Changing Face of Christianity in Africa’, in Karen L. Bloomquist (ed.), *Lutherans Respond to Pentecostalism* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2008), pp. 9–27 (12).

26. Isiramen, ‘Pentecostalism and the Nigerian Socio/Economic Debacle’, p. 309.

27. Ojo, *End-Time Army*, p. 236.

evangelists who shaped the rise of neo-Pentecostalism. Gifford, who has closely researched these relationships, reports on Kenneth Copeland, an American evangelist, teaching at a conference in Zimbabwe in the late 1980s. Copeland had a 'rigidly exclusivist understanding of who is a Christian. He dismissed most Christians as just "practising religion." ... These adherents of "Christianism" are on a level with believers in Buddhism, Marxism and all the other "-isms" in the world.'²⁸ The sharp dichotomy made between neo-Pentecostal churches and mainline churches – as if the two belong to separate religions, not different branches of the same faith – is an important component of the movement, and made for effective recruitment.

While the Bible is important throughout the Christian faith, neo-Pentecostal churches accord it a different weight and added authority than mainline denominations. Writing of a similar movement in Ghana, Omenyo concludes that charismatics have given a 'renewed sense of authority' to the Bible, 'which must be obeyed without question'. He sees this as a reaction to the charismatic leaders' perception of mainline clergy, 'who in their view treat the Bible as a document of the past and approach it with a critical mind.... charismatic renewal reckons with the fact that the most important way God speaks to his children is through his Word'.²⁹ In a similar manner, Gifford speaks of the 'performative or declarative use' of Scripture passages among neo-Pentecostals: what the Bible says must be true because it is in the Bible, and it must apply equally to the hearer's context as it did to the original context.³⁰

It is difficult to over-state just how much the religious landscape in Nigeria has been changed by the revival that followed the Biafran War. One result of this revival is the emergence of a neo-Pentecostal movement that has gone from being a movement within mainline denominations to a plethora of independent churches and denominations. These churches now exercise considerable influence on the Nigerian religious scene and propagate a unique expression of the faith that, from the very first, has constituted a challenge to the inherited forms of Christianity in Nigeria.

28. Gifford, 'Prosperity: A New and Foreign Element', p. 378.

29. Cephas Narh Omenyo, *Pentecost outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana* (Zoetermeer, The Netherlands: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 2002), p. 222.

30. Paul Gifford, 'Expecting Miracles: The Prosperity Gospel in Africa', *Christian Century*, 10 July 2007, p. 20.

The Initial Response

The revival following the Biafran War came as a discomfiting surprise to Anglicans in the pews and their leaders. As the Scripture Union became more 'fiery [and] evangelistic', leaders in the Anglican church began to 'question the form and the Spirit behind such practices, [which they saw as] un-Anglican'.³¹ The young people in the movement dismissed hallmarks of the Anglican tradition.

Decent people saw it as a great insult for untutored youths to harass them with their witnessing. In worship ... [the youth] seemed averse to what others cherished as dignified and solemn worship. They preferred extempore prayers and sermons to the traditional reading from the Prayer Book and well-written out sermons. They regarded what is written as uninspired and a hindering of the move of the Holy Spirit.³²

Older Anglicans heard glossolalia and saw it as 'the unfortunate babbling of demented individuals ... lured into the arena of demonization'.³³ The content of the preaching was difficult to handle as well. 'People who basked in social sermons of a very merciful God who gave his only Son to accommodate everybody were shocked to be told that the Christian God will send all unregenerated people and hardened sinners to burn in hell for ever. The people complained, threatened and fought to exclude the "hell preachers" from the pulpit'.³⁴ There was a fundamental difference at work, Nkwoka concludes with ironic understatement: 'it is evident that the pneumatology of the Anglican Church is at variance with the Pentecostal and charismatic presentations of the activities of the Holy Spirit'.³⁵

Anglican leaders, seeing the growing movement in their midst and the dissatisfaction it was causing some of their members, responded in several ways, banning, restricting and expelling the charismatics from their midst. Lay readers who had been influenced by the revival were forbidden from leadership positions, youths were expelled from Sunday

31. A.O. Nkwoka, 'Interrogating the Form and the Spirit: Pentecostalism and the Anglican Communion in Nigeria', in David O. Ogungbile and Akintunde E. Akinade (eds.), *Creativity and Change in Nigerian Christianity* (Lagos: Malthouse Press, 2010), pp. 79-94 (83). Nkwoka has done the most work on relations between Anglicans and the new generation churches and this section is indebted to his work.

32. Nkwoka, 'Interrogating the Form and the Spirit', p. 84. As university students, many of these people were far from 'untutored', though they may have lacked formal theological education.

33. Nkwoka, 'Interrogating the Form and the Spirit', p. 84.

34. Nkwoka, 'Interrogating the Form and the Spirit', p. 86.

35. Nkwoka, 'Interrogating the Form and the Spirit', pp. 85-86.

schools, night vigils and evangelical Bible studies were suppressed, and access to church rites was restricted to those who renounced Scripture Union membership.³⁶ There were social and familial consequences as well: 'adults were fined, rejected and ostracized by their kith and kin for disgracing them or disobeying Church authorities'.³⁷ Though there were some efforts at accommodation in places where the charismatics had gained support and sympathy, these were often half-hearted compromise solutions.³⁸ In the context, these restrictive responses made sense. The revival movement was seen as 'a doorway to confusion, indiscipline, trickery and a corruption of Anglican beliefs'.³⁹

More significantly, perhaps, Anglicans – and other mainline denominations in similar situations – initially did little to change themselves in response to the challenge posed by the revivalists. Despite the economic difficulties facing the country, mainline churches failed to address the deprivations facing the country. The mainline denominations may have dominated the church scene – even into the 1980s – but they 'were identified with the old order of the failing state'.⁴⁰ Beginning with the Biafran War and earlier political turbulence soon after independence, mainline church leaders failed to 'utter any prophetic message', difficult to do, in any case, when both church and political leaders were products of the same mission education.⁴¹ In the multiple periods of turbulence and uncertainty in the decades since Nigeria's independence, 'the mainline churches ... failed at that meeting point of liturgy and proclamation to provide people with new materials or old materials freshly voiced, that would fund, feed, nurture, nourish, legitimate, and authorise a counter-imagination of the world'.⁴²

Despite their best efforts, Anglican leaders failed to suppress the new movements. Instead, the response risked a further exodus of their membership. The desire expressed by a growing number of members of mainline denominations for charismatic elements in church could not be held back, even in the face of efforts to 'stigmatise aspects of charismatic renewal as not conforming to the traditions and

36. Nkwoka, 'Interrogating the Form and the Spirit', p. 90.

37. Nkwoka, 'Interrogating the Form and the Spirit', p. 91.

38. Nkwoka, 'Interrogating the Form and the Spirit', p. 90.

39. Nkwoka, 'Interrogating the Form and the Spirit', p. 89.

40. Ojo, 'The Pentecostal Churches', p. 268.

41. Ojo, 'The Charismatic/Pentecostal Experience in Nigeria', p. 26.

42. Ogbu U. Kalu, 'Historical Perspectives: The Third Response: Pentecostalism and the Reconstruction of Christian Experience in Africa, 1970-1995', *Journal of African Christian Thought*, 2.1 (1999), pp. 3-16 (4).

practices of the ... mainline churches'.⁴³ Gradually, aspects of the new movement began to occupy a more prominent position in the religious thought and practice of the mainline denominations.

A Changing Response to Neo-Pentecostalism

What became the neo-Pentecostal movement was undeterred by opposition from leaders of mainline religious denominations and took new strength and intensity from the economic collapse in Nigeria in the late 1980s. Rather than persist in their opposition, some Anglican leaders began to embrace the new religious practices. Kailing noticed this in the early 1990s. A revival in the Niger Delta Diocese was held and 'posters promoting the program, promising miracles of healing and deliverance, were indistinguishable from the innumerable pentecostal evangelical posters which dot the city throughout the year'.⁴⁴ At the event, when the bishop began to speak 'virtually everything he said could have come from a pentecostal evangelical primer'.⁴⁵ The chancellor of the diocese, a respected judge, spoke and began by saying, 'I was born an Anglican, but now I am an Anglican pentecostal!'⁴⁶ This single event is indicative of a broader trend of profound changes worth examining in detail. The factors associated with Pentecostalism – worship, a gospel of prosperity, an awareness of the supernatural world, a tendency to dismiss other Christians, and a unique weight given to the Bible – have all, to one degree or another, worked their way into the character of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion).

The archdeacon quoted at the beginning of this paper is a good example of the change in worship styles, in his willingness to set aside a liturgical heritage to embrace new charismatic practices. Indeed, worship services in the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) have become charismatic and free-flowing. At one service of evening prayer I attended, the open intercessions included two participants speaking in tongues. When that concluded, the congregation recited the Apostles' Creed together. At a separate service, a bishop of a major

43. Omenyo, *Pentecost outside Pentecostalism*, p. 297.

44. Kailing, 'A New Solution', p. 503.

45. Kailing, 'A New Solution', p. 503.

46. Kailing, 'A New Solution', p. 504. Across Africa in this period, many mainline denominations began to show the influence of the new religious movements. See, for instance, Josiah R. Mlahagwa, 'Contending for the Faith: Spiritual Renewal and the Fellowship Church in Tanzania'. in Thomas Spear and Isaria N. Kimambo (eds.), *East African Expressions of Christianity* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1999), pp. 296–306 (305).

eastern diocese told the congregation that 'our services are lively. The spirit is in our liturgy and that gives us power.' Few Anglican bishops of the 1970s or 1980s would have thought a 'lively' service a good thing. The liveliness is, in part, attributable to new music. Mainline congregations have begun to use music generated by the neo-Pentecostals.⁴⁷ The use of drums and dancing has also gradually spread into churches.⁴⁸ Although the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) has recently adopted a new prayer book, its text does not seem to be widely adhered to. In one service I attended, the invitation to confession – one sentence in the prayer book – took nearly ten minutes, as the worship leader reminded the congregation of God's forgiveness and the importance of repentance, citing examples from Scripture and his own life. I asked an archdeacon in an eastern diocese if he used the set prayers in his church. 'Not very much', he responded. 'Mostly we use extemporaneous prayers. But,' he quickly added, 'it is still within the ambit of Anglicanism'. (It is unclear whom or what he thought set the parameters of this 'ambit'.) While the prayer book is still a part of the church, these examples show the way in which it can be submerged in contemporary worship practices.

As Kailing's story indicates, there is a greater focus on so-called revivals and crusades in the Anglican Church. It is not uncommon to see posters, signs and banners for these events. In one eastern diocese, a large banner over the Anglican cathedral announced a '7-Day Pentecostal Experience Revival Crusade' with a large picture of the bishop of the diocese featured prominently. It is hard to imagine an Anglican bishop of a few decades past advertising a similar event; now it is unremarkable. Indeed, it is a source of excitement for members of the diocese. A northern diocese advertised a '4-Day Power-Packed Revival Programme', that promised 'salvation for the lost soul, recovery of lost glory, deliverance from Satanic oppression, breaking of curses, and business transformation'. The focus of these revivals naturally changes the prayer and worship life of the members of the church. Writing about Lutherans, Bitrus notes that 'it is no longer strange to hear ... members praying for themselves, their families, businesses, offices, cars and houses, just as neo-Pentecostals do'.⁴⁹ Whatever effort there may once

47. Asamoah-Gyadu, 'Neo-Pentecostalism and the Changing Face of Christianity in Africa', p. 13.

48. Kailing, 'A New Solution', p. 503.

49. Ibrahim Bitrus, 'The Influence of Neo-Pentecostalism in Nigeria', in Karen L. Bloomquist (ed.), *Lutherans Respond to Pentecostalism* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2008), pp. 81–88 (85).

have been to exclude or restrict these activities in mainline churches, it has ceased to be. The change in worship is complete. 'The emphasis on activities associated with the Holy Spirit has virtually moved from the periphery to the center in these historic mission churches. The names of the churches remain Methodist, Lutheran or Anglican, but the forms of worship are entirely different from those inherited from the mission forebears.'⁵⁰

As the revivals indicate, the neo-Pentecostal influence has not only changed the style of worship but the content of the church's teaching. The prosperity gospel of neo-Pentecostals has – as the bishop quoted at the beginning of the paper noted – begun to exercise an increasing influence over Anglican preachers. In one eastern diocese, the same bishop who noted the 'lively' services preached an hour-long sermon, the first half of which was on the opening verses of the book of Joshua, in which God reaffirms the gift of the Promised Land. The bishop referenced the death of Moses, with which the passage begins:

Your past represents the Biblical Moses. This morning I see little Joshuas sitting in this congregation, thinking about the challenges they will face in the future. Is anyone here a Joshua? God knows there are challenges ahead of you. That is why he is making you a Joshua. Today, heaven is laying a hand on you to do wonders in your life and family. Someone will arise this morning. There is a family that has been living in crisis that will come out of that crisis this morning.

Citing problems like a lack of money and sickness, he continued, 'Somebody is going to cross over this morning. You will go over that Jordan. Your future will be greater than your past. As from today, anywhere you put the sole of your feet, he will give it to you.... Jesus is calling you with more power than he called Joshua.' The sermon was greeted with enthusiastic 'amens' and 'hallelujahs' from the congregation. (A later section of the sermon, on the importance of unity within church congregations, failed to generate any such response.) Nor was this the only such sermon. In a northern diocese, a priest preached on a portion of Lk. 6.38, 'give and it will be given you', with no mention of any of the context of the passage. His message was simple: 'He has promised you as an individual that you will overflow.' At another service, when it came time for the offering, the pastor announced 'Offering time!' and the people responded as one, 'Blessing time!' This practice is identical to that of neo-Pentecostal prosperity churches and reflects the understanding that those

50. Asamoah-Gyadu, 'Neo-Pentecostalism and the Changing Face of Christianity in Africa', p. 21.

who give plenty will receive plenty.⁵¹ At a fourth service, three infants were baptized. While they had Igbo names, their English names were Prosper, Destiny and Victory. Prosperity thinking has deeply penetrated the religious consciousness.⁵²

The sermon on the Joshua passage also demonstrates how considerations of power have become a theme of preaching among Nigerian Anglicans. As we have seen, neo-Pentecostal beliefs stress the need for God's power as an effective force in the believer's life against the evil of the world. The cerebral approach of mainline churches has, in the past, been seen as 'impotent to deal effectively with [the] dangerous powers and influence' of spirits and other forces that are a significant feature of Nigerian cosmology.⁵³ Omenyo notes how in Ghana mainline churches have gone from denying the existence of the Devil as an 'outmoded' belief to making 'spiritual warfare one of [its] popular themes.... It is believed that there is a constant battle between God's Kingdom and that of Satan. Members are also taught that Jesus Christ was victorious over Satan and that the power of the Holy Spirit enables people to overcome evil.'⁵⁴

The awareness of a supernatural world and a focus on the power of God has resulted in a particular focus on anointing by the Holy Spirit, seen as a quantitative experience. One Anglican congregation I attended announced its upcoming week-long revival based on the theme 'Double Portion of Anointing' (a reference to Elisha's prayer in 2 Kgs 2.9). The priest in charge of the congregation emphasized that the Holy Spirit would anoint those who attended this revival twice as

51. Bitrus, 'The Influence of Neo-Pentecostalism in Nigeria', p. 84.

52. In an indication of the multiple legacies of the post-civil war revival, some Anglicans are working to counteract the influence of the prosperity gospel. During my visit, one diocese hosted an 'expository' preaching conference led by the Langham Foundation in Nigeria, an Anglican evangelical organization. The conference leaders instructed the participants in the importance of paying attention to the meaning of the text in context and showed how common prosperity gospel interpretations of some particular passages are incorrect. One leader told me, 'It is not that we are against prosperity. But I don't think the reason Jesus Christ came to earth was to bring prosperity. He came to save mankind from sin.' In spite of efforts like these, it seems clear that the prosperity gospel has taken root among Anglicans in Nigeria.

53. Essien A. Offiong, 'Youths and Pentecostalism', in David O. Ogungbale and Akintunde E. Akinade (eds.), *Creativity and Change in Nigerian Christianity* (Lagos: Malthouse Press, 2010), pp. 131-42 (135).

54. Omenyo, *Pentecost outside Pentecostalism*, p. 233.

much as at any other (namely, neo-Pentecostal) event. In particular, the Friday evening service was described as the 'Night of the Double Portion', in the apparent belief that the Holy Spirit would be particularly present at that point. In another diocese, the bishop emphasized for his ordinands how important it was that they pray for anointing before their ordination. 'To be an effective leader, you need to be anointed by God. Please, go and hunger for that power', he said. 'I want you to be double or triple anointed. You're going to be a bulldozer for the Lord.' Anointing, on this view, is something quantifiable and accessible only to some.

Anglicans have also become comfortable with the oppositional, good-evil mentality that is related to awareness of the supernatural world in neo-Pentecostal theology. In the ten days I spent with one bishop and his family, we gathered each evening for prayer and Bible study. In the concluding prayer, without fail, the bishop used the phrase 'cover this house with the blood of Jesus' to defend against the evil powers of the world. At the mention of the 'blood of Jesus', we were all to repeat it after him as he prayed. Saying the words was believed to extend that protection to us as well. The evil against which the protection is needed is clearly evident. Another bishop described his confirmation services as a chance for young people to renounce cults and gangs. Sometimes, confirmands gathered before the service to burn the paraphernalia from their gangs, perceived as demonic and non-Christian. 'Sometimes during the service, they get up and dance around crazed', the bishop said. 'Then the spirit leaves them and they collapse and are Christian.' This same bishop, when celebrating the Eucharist, added a warning to his words of invitation: 'do not receive this if you belong to a secret society or cult'. The neo-Pentecostal world-view - and its emphasis on evil powers that are antithetical to Christianity - has penetrated and shaped the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion).

Perhaps one of the most well-known characteristics of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) is the opposition to homosexuality shown by some of its leaders and a willingness to cite Biblical passages to make their point. That is certainly true. At one conference, a bishop said a Christian is 'one who believes the Bible, behaves the Bible, and bears the Bible'. Already, we have seen the weight placed on Scripture passages by neo-Pentecostals. It might be easy to assume that the belief expressed by this bishop has always been characteristic of Anglicanism in Nigeria. But that is not necessarily clear. We have already seen how neo-Pentecostals criticized mainline denominations for the perceived laxity with which they interpreted

the Bible. While this is a difficult argument to make with any finality at this point, the import accorded the Bible appears to be a new feature of Nigerian Anglicanism.

Indeed, it is not clear that this new authority has fully taken root. At one conference I attended for a fathers' organization in an eastern diocese, attendees stood to 'appreciate' the bishop's keynote address. Each took to the microphone, announced who they were, said how much money they were donating to the fathers' organization in appreciation, placed the money in an envelope and left it in a collection plate. Watching this, I thought of Jesus' instructions regarding private giving in Mt. 6.1-4. Later, I asked several clergy about the passage. All recognized it but said, quite matter-of-factly, that the practice of public giving was 'our culture'. When I asked why the American church could not say the same thing about its tolerance of homosexuality - it is 'our culture' - none seemed to know why. What they did know, however, is that, as one priest told me, 'being opposed to homosexuality has become a test of whether you believe the Bible or not'. On some topics, then - but not all - the authority of Scripture has taken on new weight among Anglicans in light of the neo-Pentecostal influence. This is one of many changes in the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) made in response to the new religious environment of the country.

Implications for the Anglican Communion

The fiercely competitive religious environment in Nigeria has, in recent decades, forced the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) to become more and more - in worship, theology, practice, and belief - like the new generation churches, significantly changing their texture and nature. Old denominational loyalties have eroded; what matters now is not denominational affiliation but 'meaningful religious experience. Many of these people, for whom denominationalism is meaningless, have found their way into new charismatic or born-again churches, thus increasing the pressure of the charismatic reformation on the mainline denominations.'⁵⁵ It is important to note that not all Anglicans have welcomed the move towards neo-Pentecostalism, and that other movements have influence, notably evangelicalism. But what is clear is that Nigerian Anglicans are aware of the changing religious environment and keep watch on the new generation churches as a business person

55. Asamoah-Gyadu, 'Neo-Pentecostalism and the Changing Face of Christianity in Africa', p. 22.

keeps watch on a competitor. One priest told me that clergy know they 'are not the only person feeding the flock'. There are other churches out there, trying to attract the same people. This is particularly true of a critical segment of society. In the past, a seminary professor told me, the 'big men' in society belonged to the mainline denominations – especially the Anglican church – and the church was supported by their tithes. But more and more, he said, the next generation of societal leaders was joining neo-Pentecostal churches. With the survival of the church clearly in mind, he said, 'The next twenty years will be very significant for the Anglican Church in Nigeria.' It seems unlikely that as well-entrenched an institution as the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) could vanish in a generation. But its status and position in society could be significantly affected. (That the church must be large in order to be successful is an ecclesiological assumption that is unchallenged, a result not only of prosperity teachings but also, perhaps, residual Anglican establishmentarianism, which lingers long in Nigeria, as elsewhere around the Communion.)

The sense of competition was reinforced at a meeting a bishop held with a parish in his northern diocese. The congregation was trying to decide whether to enlarge their church building or build a new vicarage. The bishop was firmly on the side of enlarging the church. 'When you build a modern church with air conditioning, even the Pentecostal pastors will be coming here.' He referenced a new generation church down the street. 'If you give that pastor two or three or five years, he will be opening branches all over. Build a bigger church on this land. Then even the Pentecostals will respect us.' Later, while driving home from a service at his cathedral, he enumerated for me all that he had done to improve the cathedral since he had become bishop – added fans, re-roofed the building, acquired a bigger generator to power the band's instruments when the power cut out. Now, he said, he was raising money to add air conditioning. When I asked why, he pointed to a large new church under construction we were driving past. 'These new generation churches have everything. When this one is complete, I'm sure he'll have air conditioning. If we don't, our members will start going there instead.'

The challenge posed by neo-Pentecostals means that Anglicans in Nigeria are operating from a position of threat, concern and even, in some instances, fear about the future of their church. How could they otherwise? 'The impact of neo-Pentecostalism has left the older churches with very little room to maneuver. Their very survival has come to depend not on their historic achievements in education and social work, but on how open they are to a Pentecostal or

charismatic culture.⁵⁶ Even if this is acknowledged only implicitly – and denied explicitly – on some level Nigerian Anglicans are aware that the future of their church will be different from the past. Decisions are made in light of the challenge – threat – posed by neo-Pentecostal churches.

Into this context came the decision in 2003 by the American Episcopal Church to ordain a partnered gay man as bishop. In what has followed, leaders of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) have been vociferous in their opposition to the decision. They have rejected efforts to seek consensus, refused even to engage in dialogue, boycotted the decennial Lambeth Conference in 2008, and sought to form an alternate communion of historically Anglican churches. While this situation has been seen variously as the emergence of a postcolonial communion, a sign of irreconcilable differences over Scriptural interpretation, or the emergence of a conservative Anglican bloc, I believe that the context of neo-Pentecostalism in Nigeria has been a major contributing factor to the position of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) in conversations about the future of global Anglicanism.

In response to the divisions in the Communion, the 2008 Lambeth Conference was structured around an ‘indaba’ process that emphasized listening, dialogue, and a ‘commitment to see others as disciples living in their different circumstances’.⁵⁷ Yet in an environment in which faith is seen as a source of power to combat the evil forces of the world, a willingness to dialogue – and the attendant implication that one might be wrong – cannot but be seen as a sign of weakness. Moreover, a willingness to dialogue on the particular issue of homosexuality is particularly difficult because the issue is believed to be so obviously settled by the Bible. Leaders of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) must show that their church can provide power to its members. Talking about differences with partners around the world, especially partners in what are widely known to be shrinking churches and who seem to be so clearly wrong, would be seen as foolish, wrong or weak. In this context, it is no wonder Nigerian bishops refused to attend Lambeth.

As we have seen, a sharp division of the world into good and evil and a willingness to dismiss other Christians as not truly Christian is

56. Asamoah-Gyadu, ‘Neo-Pentecostalism and the Changing Face of Christianity in Africa’, p. 20.

57. Mark Chapman, ‘Introduction’, in Martyn Percy, Mark Chapman, Ian Markham and Barney Hawkins (eds.), *Christ and Culture: Communion after Lambeth* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2010), p. 24.

an important feature of neo-Pentecostalism. This position seems to be evident in the position of Nigerian Anglican leaders towards the American church. The particularly strident and condemnatory tones of their disagreement about the decision to consecrate Gene Robinson have been noteworthy. While it is impossible to conclude what might have been different had the issue of homosexuality emerged in an environment not shaped by neo-Pentecostalism, a comparison with women's ordination seems instructive. That issue, which came to the fore in the Anglican Communion as neo-Pentecostalism was emerging, was a source of contention for Anglicans worldwide. In general, however, Nigerian Anglicans seemed more willing to accept a diversity of practices and greater provincial autonomy than they do now, even though both homosexuality and the ordination of women can be condemned on the basis of Scriptural passages. In the twenty-first century, in an environment in which Nigerian Anglicans have been called 'dead pastors' and accused of not truly knowing the Bible, Nigerian Anglican leaders seem to be turning the rhetoric once directed at them on their partners around the world.

The purpose of this paper has been to make an initial attempt at describing something of the religious environment in Nigeria and speculate as to how that environment has shaped conversations - or their absence - in the Anglican Communion. It is an incomplete picture, omitting, for instance, any reference to Islam, as large a factor in the Nigerian religious environment as neo-Pentecostalism, as well as any mention of the ways in which neo-Pentecostals are emulating Anglicans, particular in titles and styles of dress. Moreover, it is clear that Anglican evangelicalism, particularly the Decade of Evangelism in the 1990s, has had a powerful shaping force on the Nigerian church, which needs to be more carefully investigated. This paper is not designed to be a comprehensive account of the current state of the Nigerian church or a prescription for a future course to overcome the challenges identified here. Nor has its purpose been to critique the content of the new teachings of the Nigerian church; Nigerians are already quite able in that regard and the role properly begins with them.⁵⁸

Perhaps the chief lesson of this paper is an obvious but widely neglected point: in discerning a future for the Anglican Communion,

58. See, for example, Isiramen, 'Pentecostalism and the Nigerian Socio/Economic Debacle', and Deji Isaac Ayegboyin, 'A Rethinking of Prosperity Teaching in the New Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria', *Black Theology*, 4.1 (2006), pp. 70-86.

a serious and deep awareness of the context in which Anglicans minister is of central importance. Moreover, if, in fact, it is fear that is an impediment to dialogue, overcoming that fear is a first step towards dialogue. In doing so, Anglicans – both in Nigeria and around the world – might look to the model of Christ and ask what it would mean to ‘empty’ ourselves, let go of our traditionally privileged position in society, and render ourselves vulnerable to the workings of the Spirit in our midst.