

**CHARISMATIC RENEWAL WITHIN THE METHODIST CHURCH NIGERIA - A PAPER PRESENTED AT THE 14<sup>TH</sup> OXFORD INSTITUTE OF METHODIST THEOLOGICAL STUDIES BY VERY REV DR. CHINONYEREM CHIJOKE EKEBUI, DIRECTOR, BOARD FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION, METHODIST CHURCH NIGERIA.**

**INTRODUCTION**

This paper made attempts to trace the processes through which Charismatic Renewal infiltrated, influenced and changed the landscape of Methodist Church Nigeria. It examines the nature and growth of the various contacts of Methodist Church Nigeria with Pentecostalism. It concludes by tracing the history, growth and activities of Methodist Evangelical Movement (MEM) and how the movement helped to change the landscapes of Methodist Church Nigeria in favor of Charismatic Pentecostalism.

**CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT IN NIGERIA**

The Charismatic movements represent the third stream of Pentecostalism in Nigeria. Ogbu Kalu calls it the “third response” to white cultural dominance over the church in Africa.<sup>1</sup> The earliest, being the Aladura or prophet-healing Churches, which resulted from the visionary experiences and activities of some men and women such as Joseph Babalola, who funded Christ Apostolic Church (Aladura) and Agnes Okoh who founded Christ Holy Church in 1947. The second stream or response was the churches that resulted from the activities of western missionaries in Nigeria, such as the Assemblies of God Church and Foursquare Gospel Church. And the third being the Charismatic movement that emerged from the late decades of 1960s

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<sup>1</sup> Ogbu U. Kalu, ‘The Third Response: Pentecostalism and Reconstruction of Christian Experience in Africa, 1970-1995’ *Journal of African Christian Thought*. 1, 2, (1998), 3.

and early decades of 1970s within the Mainline churches. However despite their more recent history in Nigeria, they have much wider influence because, both the educated elite and the urban dwellers sustained the movement.

Two major works had considered the roots of Charismatic Renewal in Nigeria. The first is by Matthews Ojo, who examined its origins and developments in Western Nigeria, with its roots in the university campuses and the work of Scripture Union.<sup>2</sup> The second is by Richard Burgess.<sup>3</sup> In his work, Burgess traced the origins and development in Eastern Nigeria, planting its roots in the Scripture Union Nigeria Pilgrims groups. These two accounts are important and have great effect to our examination of the incursion of Pentecostalism into Methodist Church Nigeria.

According to Ojo's account, the student's contacts with Pentecostal literature stimulated a revival that centered on the Pentecostal experiences of baptism of the Holy Spirit accompanied with the gifts of speaking in tongues. It later precipitated a substantial religious awakening in the Nigeria higher institutions. As the student graduated and took up employment in different establishments, they took along this Pentecostal view of things and principles into the larger societies and they became the purveyors of these ideals in the mid 1970s. The revival progressed rapidly, and by the mid – 1970s, the revival had saturated the evangelical circles in most of the Universities in the Southern part of Nigeria. By the end of the same decade, it had spilled over into the larger society, where it was initially sustained within the Scripture Union Pilgrim Groups. By the mid 1980s, the Charismatic Movement had become a major social movement as the Pentecostal spirituality affected millions of citizens in various ways.

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<sup>2</sup> Matthews A. Ojo, *The End – Time Army: Charismatic Movement in Modern Nigeria*, (Eritrea: Africa World Press Inc, 2006)

<sup>3</sup> Richard Burgess, *Nigeria Christian Revolution: The Civil War Revival and Its Pentecostal Progeny, 1967-2000* (Cumbria: Paternoster 2008)

Richard Burgess's account shows that the Nigerian civil war, or the Biafra crises exposed the frailties of mission church spirituality and the inflexibility of their organizational structures.<sup>4</sup> Also, the war helped to decasualize Igbo traditional religion as young people in the cause of fighting, sought refuge in the 'Evil forest', the reserved areas of the deities, and in the traditional shrines. They literally trampled underfoot traditional religious objects and places and they did not die. So in the aftermath of the war, many Igbos became disillusioned with the old gods and ancestors who had failed to protect them and give them victory.

He emphasized that several factors contributed to the decline in mission Christianity during the war, of importance was the fact that many Igbos found the brand of Christianity represented by the mainline churches as lacking the needed power to help them cope with the stress engendered by the war.<sup>5</sup> So, he argued that the civil war revival that gave birth to the Charismatic renewal proceeded in several distinct stages. The first occurred soon after the outbreak of the war. Following the closure of educational institutions, many young people began to congregate at Scripture Union headquarters in Umuahia, which had become the capital of Biafra after the fall of Enugu in September 1967. At this time, Bill Roberts, the British S.U representative in the East had decided to remain in the war enclave. His decision to remain made a great impression upon the youths particularly as Britain had come out in support of the Federal Government of Nigeria. As the war escalated, refugees poured into Umuahia and many secondary school students sought refuge at S.U. headquarters, where they were gradually forged into an interdenominational community. Some of the older, more senior members of S.U

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Burgess, *Nigeria Christian Revolution*. 86

<sup>5</sup> Burgess, *Nigeria Christian Revolution*, 86

Umuahia were Scripture Union leaders from Enugu. Others were former Evangelical Christian Union (ECU) leaders, who had come to Umuahia following the closure of the University of Nigeria (UNN) at the beginning of the war. The second stage of the revival was a period of mobilization as Igbo urban centers were overrun by Federal troops; the revivalists migrated to the rural areas where they reported favourable response to their message. The fall of Umuahia in April 1969 was a critical event that provided the main impetus for the second phase. With the evacuation, there was dispersion of Christians, who had been trained under Bill Roberts. Wherever these Christians went, they carried with them the light of Christ, which they spread as they went.

The climax of the revival occurred in the aftermath of the war, as access to cities was opened which, prior to this time was restricted. As revivalists migrated to these metropolitan centers in search of employment or to reclaim homes, they carried the revival message with them. Educational institutions in the East did not resume immediately and jobs were scarce, so there were many young aspiring evangelists, with time on their hands, preaching the gospel became their full time occupation. A new wave of revival swept through Igboland by this time, incubated within S.U. pilgrim groups, which had replaced some of the school groups as the major focus of Scripture Union in the East.

There are numerous evidences that suggest otherwise that the Nigerian charismatic movement had its deepest roots and had most of its early leaders within the University campuses and among the educated elite.<sup>6</sup> In Burgess' findings, he discovered that in the Eastern part of Nigeria, most founders of Charismatic fellowship did not attend university, and that the Igbo

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<sup>6</sup>Burgess, *Nigeria Christian Revolution*, 95

founded Charismatic fellowship groups were among the earliest to emerge in Africa. By 1973, there were at least thirteen Igbo founded Charismatic fellowships. None had any formal link with university campus activities in the early 1970s.<sup>7</sup>

The Nigeria Charismatic Movement had an indigenous origin, and grew within an indigenous milieu until the mid 1970s, when some of the groups established linkages with similar organizations in North America. Thereafter, the Nigeria movement became transnational as they forged linkages across the continent with similar Pentecostal organization in North America and Europe for the generation of material and financial resources. Increasing migration from the mid 1980s facilitated constant networking with charismatic groups of the African Diaspora in the West. Certainly, African Charismatic groups in the West have shown that they can transcend their origins and enter new cultural milieus.

The success of this revival lay in its missionary impulse, which was kindled with the Scripture Union fellowship groups during the war. Also, in Western Nigeria, the Charismatic revival that began in the campuses crystallized into Charismatic Organization.<sup>8</sup> As the leaders of the revival in the West were graduating from the universities and in the East, as they were moving out into the urban cities in search of better life, they carried with them their Pentecostal enthusiasm into their new places of work and into the larger society. Members were critical of the mainline churches for promoting a liberal and nominal form of Christianity and the mission related Pentecostal Churches which had offered alternative options before now had decline in Pentecostal vigour due to the combined effects of bureaucratization and routinization.

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<sup>7</sup> Burgess, *Nigeria Christian Revolution*, 95

<sup>8</sup> Matthews Ojo, "The Nigeria Baptist Convention and the Pentecostal Resurgence, 1970 – 2000: Critical issues for Ecclesiastical Dynamics" in Ademola Ishola & Deji Ayegboyin (eds.), *Ecclesiastes* (Ibadan: Baptist Press (Nig) Ltd 2006), 327

These young revivalists thought the best thing to do was to establish alternative organizations to challenge them. Initially they 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 churches. Hence, they described themselves as interdenominational or non-denominational organizations. By the mid 1980s, paid clergy mostly trained in Bible schools or those who have been associated with the founders emerged. Their structure of administration became formalized with discernible hierarchy and line of authority.<sup>9</sup> They quickly utilized the globalizing options available by their appropriation of the media and media technologies. The media did not only act as channels of information for them, it spread their ideology, taste, and consciousness.<sup>10</sup> Paul Gifford, noting this said “the media presentation of these churches are molding what counts as Christianity in Cotemporary Ghana.”<sup>11</sup> Also, it makes them appear true, more beautiful, with a kind of mystical authority.

De Witte alluding to said,

Media technologies like television and film can make things and person more beautiful and attractive than they really are, while at the same time presenting them as true and accessible. They give them a mystical kind of authority that makes people desire or follow them... Apart from the media as an effective channel for spreading the gospel of Christ to masses, they are also used to enhance an image of success...<sup>12</sup>

Their use of the mass media brought about a complex re-ordering of patterns of their interaction across space and time. Indeed, global communication greatly aided their

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<sup>9</sup>Ojo, “The Nigeria Baptist convention”,331

<sup>10</sup>Ojo “The Nigeria Baptist convention”,332

<sup>11</sup> Paul Gifford., 2004. Ghana’s New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press), 33

<sup>12</sup>De Witte, “Alter Media’s Living word. Televised Charismatic Christianity in Ghana” in *Journal of Religion in Africa*. No 33(2003): 174

internationalization all over the world. Although, other Christian groups are involved in media utilization, it is more characteristic of the charismatic and Pentecostal movements.

### **MAJOR PRACTICES AND THEMES OF THE CHARISMATIC RENEWAL**

Several themes recur in the Pentecostal initiatives, which are characteristic of revivals generally. Every wave of revival showed elements of continuity and discontinuity with previous movements. Each new wave of Pentecostalism brought renewal to existing churches. Each new wave often generates new theological emphases and left traces of its influence once its charismatic impulses subsided. As Asamoah-Gyadu emphasized, “that although the Sunsum Sore may be declining quantitatively ...their qualitative impact on ... Christianity continues through an enduring religious and theological heritage”<sup>13</sup> Each movement contributed to the contextualization of the gospel and the resacralisation of the religious landscape. Charismatics generally appealed to the margins of the church but when rejected by the center normally creates schisms and emergence of new denominations and increased plurality.

Although, the Bible has broadened the outlook of Pentecostals and Charismatics but their basic traditional African cosmology was little affected as noted by Ojo.<sup>14</sup> The success of the Charismatic revival lay in its continuity and discontinuity with African traditional religions. They introduced new ideas to the Nigeria religious repertoire and new means to obtain old objective. Their emphases on healing, success, prosperity, deliverance, miracles, signs and wonders, are rooted in the appropriation of power in its traditional and modern forms. The movement is almost entirely urban, which is the best environment to sustain a religious

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<sup>13</sup> J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Development with Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana*. (Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, Leiden 2005), 36

<sup>14</sup> Ojo, ‘The Nigeria Baptist convention’,333

phenomenon that relies heavily on the electronic and print media to gain membership. As an urban reality, Charismatic Renewal groups share the demographic characteristics of city life, like its cosmopolitan nature and predominant presence of upwardly mobile youths. Their message of motivation, which attempts to identify the source of frustrations in the lives of people and encourage them that, it could be well, appeals to upwardly mobile youth. Their other attraction includes an exuberant and expressive worship life, international outlook and messages of prosperity and success. They tacitly equally approve a relaxed modern and fashion-conscious dress code for members.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, they preach against ethnocentricity by singing songs that have multilingual appeal and call themselves brothers and sisters in Christ. They conduct services with electronic keyboards; drum sets, and public address systems. The use of literature – their own printed magazines, tracts, booklets etc – has aided the wider dissemination of their spirituality in the country. The modernizing orientation of Pentecostalism and its global outlook appealed greatly to youths. Pentecostal ritual steeped in English language - a global communication language – becomes the defining principle of the new religious phenomenon in the country.

It is the doctrinal emphases and practices of the Charismatics and Pentecostals that have had greater impact on the mainline Protestant denominations, and the disagreements have centered on these premises. First charismatic movements place high premium on the use of the bible. Hence most of their doctrinal emphases are developed in the literary interpretation of the scripture. They developed a system of teaching and preaching that makes their message more relevant to people's situations. Charismatics understood their teachings to be a restoration of Apostolic Christianity. Their greatest emphasis has been on healing, which has often been

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<sup>15</sup> J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu., Mth lecture reading notes on Religion/Theology and media in Africa. 2007



demonstrated with a very wide application. They insist that once Christians pray and have faith, healing must take place, and even the dead can be brought back to life. Generally, Charismatics focus on physical healing and secondly, on casting out of demons, which is termed deliverance.

Their teaching on ‘success and prosperity’ in recent years, is understood by them as a form of liberation from difficulties of life. These definitions of healing have taken positive account of traditional African worldviews. Moreover, charismatics have actually made literal interpretations of the scriptures with potentially far-reaching implications. The devil is held responsible for every unexpected end in people’s day-to-day lives. According to Asamoah-Gyadu, “Healing and deliverance provide the ritual context for articulating a response to the inevitable shortfalls existing in the ‘redemptive uplift’ expected to accompany new life in Christ. If such transformation does not yield results in terms of victory over sin and prosperity in life, it is thought that evil powers might be hampering one’s progress.”<sup>16</sup>

Charismatics have also emphasized prosperity through which they have engineered personal empowerment and have also, provided motivation for rapid upward social mobility. From the quest for personal material comfort, Charismatics have moved to strengthen personal ambition from a very strict 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. Wealth is a means to recognition in the society and the means towards political power. People have used various means to acquire wealth. The charismatics believe, however, that power would accrue to them through their access to spiritual knowledge with, which they would sway the material universe and bring it under God’s plan and purpose. Therefore, they teach that, it is

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<sup>16</sup>Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 165

sinful for Christians to be poor; rather, everyone can and must enjoy abundance. Larbi makes a preference for the appropriate terminology “Abundant life Gospel rather than prosperity Gospel”<sup>17</sup> It is against this broad background that we can evaluate the charismatic worldview.

Charismatics insist that miracles, signs and wonders are parts of the common experiences of Christians. To them, any evangelistic effort that is not accompanied by signs and wonders, are incomplete and inadequate. This obsession with miracles now dominates most camp meetings, Holy Ghost renewal meetings and evangelistic activities. Indeed, the quest for miracles has made Christianity to become utilitarian,<sup>18</sup> always geared to serve the interests and needs of Nigerians. Furthermore, Charismatics insists that all Christians must undergo the baptism of the Holy Spirit at a certain point in their lives, and they must speak in tongues to confirm the inwards experiences. The gift of tongues is accepted to be part of corporate worship, and can also be used in private devotional worship. It is assumed that the person who speaks in tongues is a better Christian than the person who does not. In fact, Charismatics teach that baptism in the spirit offer quick and easy spirituality. Many pamphlets and sermons from Pentecostal pulpits have emphasized this doctrinal position.

Lastly, evangelisms or soul winning is a central belief and practice among Charismatics. They teach that a Christian must engage himself or herself in evangelistic activities all the time. This could be by distributing tracts, preaching in buses or street corners, going from one house to the other, from person to person and so on. This emphasis on evangelism soon developed into a consciousness of missions with much political significance. Charismatics insist that Nigeria, as

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<sup>17</sup> K. Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity*. (Accra: Center for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies, 2001), 313

<sup>18</sup> Ojo, ‘The Nigeria Baptist convention’, 336

the acclaimed 'giant of Africa', should be a bastion for the evangelization of the continent. Unlike the existing Protestant churches, Charismatic movements have made significant strides in indigenous African missions, and their missionary activities have spread to many parts of Africa and beyond. Largely, through the formation of indigenous mission agencies, many of which are non-denominational, for the recruitment, training, sending, supporting and supervising missionaries, and through the territorial extension of branches of Charismatic organizations to new areas, Charismatic missions are advancing rapidly all over Africa.

Their missionary activities have included evangelism, and church planting; spreading the gospel with the goal of countering the advance of Islam in Africa; social and industrial missions, the provision of social amenities and services towards the amelioration of the condition of the people, and lastly the mobilization and empowerment of Christians in other countries to see what they themselves could do to reach the unreached people within their nations. Since the early 1980s, Charismatics have been training leaders of Charismatic organizations from other African nations. For example, in 1980 the Deeper Life Church established the International Bible Training Centre in Lagos for the training of Africans all over the continent. By 1981, there were about 600 students from about twenty countries in the institutions<sup>19</sup>. Charismatic missions have been successful in spreading the Charismatic renewal and in contributing to Church growth in Africa. Therefore, the vigorousness of Charismatic missions in Africa really indicates that Africa long considered as a mission field is becoming a mission base, and this offers a challenge to Western missions to consider themselves as partners with African missionaries in evangelizing Africa.

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<sup>19</sup> Ojo, 'The Nigeria Baptist convention', 336

## **INCURSION OF PENTECOSTALISM INTO METHODIST CHURCH NIGERIA**

There have been instances of Pentecostal experiences within Methodist Church Nigeria since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In spite of this early appearance of the charismata within the church, the phenomenon did not become a great force until the beginning of the 1980s. This is the period when the phenomenon became recognized as a potent force within Methodist Church Nigeria. Larbi outlines two ways these Charismatic experiences operated in the mainline Churches.<sup>20</sup> First, a person –centered church-based type, this he argued centers around an individual or individuals in the congregation. This may be among the Clergy or the laity. Special sessions are organized in the church during which, the gifted individual could exercise the charismatic gifts. Thus, the continuity of the practice depends largely upon the availability of the individual. Second is the congregational in which the gifts of the Holy Spirit are allowed to operate normally during the various services of the church under the control of the local leadership. With a large number of the leadership including the pastors as Charismatic, the gifts do not function only at the meetings of a particular group, but as part of the spirituality of the entire congregation. Bible study, tithing, prayers, glossolalia, prophecies and visions are all emphasized.

Ojo had emphasized that the Charismatic Renewal produced a substantial religious and social changes of diverse impacts in various denominations in the country. By the late 1970s, most of the mainline Protestant churches – Methodist, Anglican, Baptist and Presbyterian, had cause to react to the growing influence of the Charismatic Renewal that was seeping into their

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<sup>20</sup> Larbi , *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity*, 83

congregations, causing apprehension among the leadership of the denominations.<sup>21</sup> Methodist Church Nigeria was not left out in this development, and contact of the Methodist evangelical traditions with Pentecostalism generated much controversy. Methodist members that embraced these charismatic orientations had many clashes with the authorities of the church over what official records often called “Un-Methodist practices”. One group that stood at the center of the controversy of the Pentecostal incursion into the Methodist Church Nigeria was the Methodist Evangelical Movement (MEM). MEM from 1970s operated at the periphery of the church, until 1990, when the church officially appointed the first MEM Director and established an office for MEM.

### **Birth of Methodist Evangelical Movement (MEM) in the West**

Some young people, who claimed that God through his Spirit instructed them, started an Evangelical Group in 1972, at Methodist Church, Agodi, Ibadan in Oyo State of Nigeria. The immediate objective of this group was to foster the work of evangelism in the church. The leaders of this small group of about ten people were brother Sayo Oladejo and the Revd. O. Olatunji. He was the Minister (pastor) of the Agodi Methodist Church then. This group among other activities travelled around the villages, preaching the evangelical gospel. A similar group like the Agodi Evangelical group was established around 1975, known as “ Egbe Ajere Okan Fun Kristi,” in Elekuro Methodist Church Ibadan. A member of this group called Madam V.M. Thomas, who worshiped at the Agbeni Methodist Cathedral, Ibadan was so zealous for the Lord. She went to the Youth Assembly at Ago Iwoye in 1977, and met one brother Gbade Adeleke from Agodi, and sister Fawole (now Adeoye) from Elekuro, Ibadan. They discovered that they nursed the same vision and then, planned on how both Evangelical Groups of Agodi

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<sup>21</sup> Ojo, “The Nigeria Baptist Convention”, 328

and Egbe Ajere Okom Fun Kristi of Elekuro could work together in order to establish the same in other churches.

Several meetings were held with the Elekuro brethren and Agbeni group to exploit options on how best to establish the Evangelical Group in Agbeni Methodist Church. The first meeting was on the second Sunday of October 1977, at Agbeni with brother Jide Ayoade and sister Adeoye both from Ajere-Okam, Elekuro and the Agbeni brethren. The second meeting was in December, 1977, between brother Gbade Adeleke and Madam V.M. Thomas. After this meeting Madam V.M. Thomas started Sunday morning choruses in the church on January 1978, before the commencement of the service in order to bring like minds together. Among the first people that joined this chorus time were Madam Kaiyewu and Madam Kalejaiye. April, 1978, saw the first combined meeting of the two groups at Agodi Methodist church. Brother Lanre Fakolade joined in June that same year in response to the visitation extended to him by Madam V.M. Thomas. In one of the combined fellowships, brother Lanre suggested that a retreat should be organized most probably around Easter periods so as to occupy themselves with the word of God during the period. The retreat came up from 12<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> April 1979 at Methodist High School, Ibadan. Plus other activities at the retreat the brethren gave enough time to Bible study with bro. Lanre Fakolede, Gabriel Akimbode, Boye Adetunji, Gbade Adeleke and Sis Sola Fakolede as bible study leaders. In 1980 Ogbomoso and Oyo brethren joined through the activities of brother Jide Ayoade, Gbade Adeleke and Sola Olayanju. These evangelical groups in Agodi, Elekuro, Agbeni, Oyo and Ogbomoso started meeting for fellowship every last Saturday of the month at Agodi Methodist Church Ibadan. After four consecutive meetings at Agodi Methodist Church a suggestion came up that the

venue should be rotated so that other churches would be aware of what is going on. The brethren accept it and started the rotation.

The second camp meeting came up in April 1980. The venue was Methodist High School, Ibadan. After this retreat Revd. Mike Oye who was in Osogbo then intimated then that, a group had also been established in Osogbo, and suggested a link up. In July 1980 the Osogbo brethren joined through the activities of borthers Sola Olayanju and Gbade Adeleke. Madam V.M.. Thomas met Revd 'Femi Oladele of Methodist Church, Ile-Ife in August 1980. This meeting and the subsequent discussions made the Redemption Group, which had been existing since September, 1978, in Methodist Church, Ile-Ife to join the fellowship of Evangelical groups and eventually changed their name to Evangelical Group.

The third camp meeting was held on December 24-28, 1980, at Methodist Church, Apaara, Oyo. The retreat's emphasis was mainly on "Christian Growth" and many participants were blessed to the point that the fellowship witnessed a rapid spiritual growth of members afterwards. Topics treated at this time include "Love not the world" and the bible study focused on "what are you pursuing?" "The heat of man" and "partial and total obedience".

From the third retreat, it became an annual event. The date for this third one was between 23<sup>rd</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> December, 1981. It was tagged "Christmas Retreat". The retreat was integrated with open air crusade and house to house evangelism in the town of Gbongan in Oyo State. Methodist Church was eventually established at Gbongan. Among the speakers were Revd. Mike Oye who preached on "The Day of Visitation and Examine Yourselves". Practical Discussion were also held on "Evangelism Within the Church."

During the fifth retreat that was between 24<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup> December 1982, at Fiditi Grammar School, Fiditi, which was tagged “December Camp and Crusade” the Topics that came up that year included “Ministering to Non-Christians”. The testimonies that ensued included healing, deliverance and salvation. Pentecostal spirituality began to seep into this group as the sixth retreat witnessed the first Holy Ghost ministration, on record and the brethren witnessed the Holy Ghost baptism. In the following year, which marked the seventh retreat, more Pentecostal influence topics came up like “Take it by force, Fruits of the Tongue, Spiritual Things, Spiritual Gifts and Second Coming of Christ.” The ninth retreat witnessed messages like. “The End Time Army” by Evang. Lekan Babatunde, “Wwater Baptism” by Revd. Mike Oye, “Possess Your Possession” by Bro Adetonji and “Baptism of the Holy Spirit” by Bro. Friday Bekky from University of Ibdan. He stood in place of Revd. Moses Aransiola that was originally slated for the programme.

The eleventh retreat was at Methodist High School Ilesa from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> December 1988. The theme “Come and Let Us Rebuild”. This emphasis was on the need for Christians to come together in order to rebuild the wall of Methodist Church Nigeria at such a time when carnality and party spirit had broken down the wall of righteousness and unity. Participants of these retreats witnessed the demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit. The visitation of the power of God and the divine influence of the Holy Spirit was further made evident as the members shared their testimonies and experiences. Deliverance hour /Holy Ghost night was at this time instituted as part of the normal retreat programmes. Also, of interest that year was topics like “Christians in Politics”. As the group grew they began to have interactions with other Pentecostal groups. During their twelfth retreat at Bishop Philip’s Academy, Iwo Road,



Ibadan in 1989, Pastor Dejo Akande, the leader of Christ Ambassadors Evangelistic Team, (CAET), Ibadan was invited.

According to Gabriel Oluleke Akinbode in his report of the twelfth retreat.

Brethren began to arrive at the camp ground as from 7.30am. The first set of participants to come were brethren from Igbo-Ora. Then registration of the participants started immediately and continued till evening as people trooped in. brethren came from Methodist churches such as Agbeni, Agodi, Elekuro, Ekotedo, Odo-Ona, Bodya and Agugu. Others came from Ile-Ife, Ilesa, Osogbo, Fiditi, Oyo, Ogbomoso, Ile-Ogbo, Iwo and Iseyin. We also had participants from Igbo-Ora, Ilisan, Idere and Ketu-Lagos. Apart from Methodist brethren, some people also came from different denominations. Specifically there were people from Deeper Life Bible church, Ile-IFE, St Paul's Anglican church, Yemetu, Ibadan, Assemblies of God church, Ibadan, Christian Fellowship, Abuja and Christian church Olorunsogo, Ibadan.<sup>22</sup>

At this time they came up with a statement of their aim and belief which item 11/12 reads, that the baptism in the Holy Ghost is the infilling of power from on high upon the sanctified believer. It is “the promise of the Father” and the receiving of this “gift of the Holy Ghost” is accompanied by the initial evidence of speaking in an unknown language referred to as speaking in tongues as the Spirit gives utterance and that the gifts of the Spirit are for today.

In each local church, there were activities such as Bible study, prayer meeting, special talks, deliverance services, house to house evangelism, crusade, revival outreaches, singspiration, drama, seminars, child evangelism and wings like prayer band, choral wing, witnessing wing and others. Church leaders and members viewed this fellowship with mix feelings. Some people held the opinion that the members of these fellowships would soon break away and carry away their members. Some other people had the opinion that a new doctrine or

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<sup>22</sup> Gabriel O Akinbode, “God at Work: In the Western part of Methodist Church Nigeria” (An Unpublished paper, 1992), 5

commandment has been introduced to the church. The authorities reacted against the new experience as they rejected speaking in tongues (speaking in an unknown language as the Spirit gives utterance). They also rejected and opposed praying aloud and holding of night vigil plus seeing vision. Also the idea of some members of the fellowship forsaking jewelry and unnecessary decoration of the body did not go down well with members, who accused them of “holier than thou” attitude.

Very important here is the fact that, the fellowship sprang up from the grassroots and that acceptance of it in each church depends on the attitude of the minister in charge. This caused some fellowship programmes to be disturbed and some members rough-handled. In another case, it degenerated into completely sending the fellowship members out of the church and locking the doors against them. Despite all the persecution and trail, the members of this group remained strong and steadfast because of their conviction that through the power of God, the church is being resuscitated again through effective evangelism right from the grassroots.

### **Birth of MEM in the East**

The pioneers of MEM in the East operated during the early stage at the periphery of the church for some years. The S.U pilgrim groups that replaced the school groups in the East immediately after the war gathered a lot of young Christians to its bosom. S.U with its emphasis on maintaining good Church membership instilled this discipline in the lives of people like bro E.C Achi, Godswill Ukpabi, Jeremiah Agu, Anya Chukwu whom were all Methodists and from the same village. They started meeting together for fellowship and prayers in Aba where they were living. Sometimes they tarried all nights. According to J.K Udensi now Udenze the First Lay Conference Director of MEM.

... the war came to an end in 1970 ... people who were displaced returned to their homes. Others of like minds remembered their various vows to live, love and serve God. This led them to coming together for fellowship, Bible study, Prayers and real display of God's love. Such fellowship cut across denominational barriers ... God poured down the Holy Ghost in such a dimension that people caught the flame as of the Apostles of Old ...<sup>23</sup>

The group continued meeting at Bro E.C. Achi's house. Rev Joshua N Dimoji who was then the Superintendent Minister of Aba Circuit later noticed their activities. Rev. Joshua N. Dimoji, according to official records, was stationed at Aba Circuit in 1972; he assumed duty as the superintendent of the circuit in July 1972. He became the acting Chairman of Umuahia District from September 1, 1975, until he was made the Bishop of Umuahia in 1976.<sup>24</sup> So between 1972 and 1975 while he worked as Superintendent of Aba circuit, he encouraged this group to move into the church for proper supervision by a minister, since all of them that meet at E.C Achi's house were Methodists. The focus of this group changed and shifted in 1976, as a result of the crisis that erupted because of the 1976 constitution, from meeting for edification to praying for the Church. Bro R.N. Okocha was visiting this group from Abakaliki, where he was living with his brother. They now engaged in fasting and weeping to God for healing and for the reunification of the church. Udensi observed, "There were revival groups to which many from different churches resorted for spiritual nurture. Many of them came back to their churches to practice all that they learnt."<sup>25</sup> As a result of the scattering and migration from the war torn areas to other parts of the Country, some Methodists who caught this revival flame were found in the Northern and Western parts of Nigeria. Acceptance of this people within the church depended on decisions of the leaders, some church leaders refused to accommodate this revival flame. Udensi went on to say

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<sup>23</sup> J.K.Udensi, "Methodist Revival and Evangelism Past, Present and Future." ( An unpublished work, n.p; n.d ) 22

<sup>24</sup> Souvenir for the Commemoration of the Patriarchy of M.C.N

<sup>25</sup> Udensi, *Methodist Revival and Evangelism*, 22.

Many such churches closed their doors against revivalists and enacted many laws against such people. I recall when Methodist Church Nigeria 'decreed' that you must choose between membership of the Scripture Union and Methodist Church Nigeria. The antagonistic approach to the issue of revival led to the exodus of many members of some established churches including Methodist Church Nigeria, to other churches.

While they closed the doors behind the new movement, the smaller churches swung theirs wide open to receive them. The Methodist Church Nigeria suffered more loss of members than all other churches because of the crisis that erupted among her. Rev Ministers were hauled out of the churches and others were really beaten up. Most of the Sundays, people who were unlucky to attend church without knowing of a plan to fight that day, ended up in police custodies. Many real Christians saw no reason to remain in the church again. I can say without fear of any contradiction that 70% of membership of any of the Charismatic churches in Nigeria were once Methodist members.<sup>26</sup>

At the early stage of the Methodist Church Nigeria crisis<sup>27</sup> and because of the exodus of members, the Rev J.N. Dimoji gathered members of this group at Bro James Achi's house for prayers and briefing. The thrust of this group changed after this briefing, from a prayer team to an outreach team with Bro Anya Chukwu who later became Methodist Minister, as the Aba Leader.<sup>28</sup> Because almost all the members of this group as at then were from one village - Item they decided to extend this outreach programmes to their home. Item was the hub of the crisis because Rev Chile Ogan who was a major player in the crises was from Item. Bro R.N Okocha was chosen to co-ordinate both the Aba and Item Movements. Their first plan was to spend three days at Alayi a neighboring village with Item and three days at Item. The very first Revival/Outreach was at Amankalu Alayi. At this time, their mission orientation was so high that they gave time and all that it took to prosecute this vision. Alayi and Item were soon covered, they moved to Otampa in Isuikwuato and to Uzuakoli. After the revival of Uzuakoli

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<sup>26</sup> Udensi, *Methodist Revival and Evangelism* 22-23.

<sup>27</sup> Methodist Church Nigeria experienced a crisis that lasted from 1976 -1990 over the adoption of major administrative changes and the church divided into two – 1962 and 1976 factions.

<sup>28</sup> Isaac Ogbonna, I interview him at his manse in Uzuakoli in July 2008

Bro R.N Okocha travelled to Britain for further studies and he handed over to Bro. Isaac Ogbonna. With Isaac as the new coordinator they connected the brethren in Enugu Diocese to come and team up with them for the evangelization of the Conference area. The brethren in Enugu responded favourably well. With their coming, a more embracing name became necessary. They initially called the movement Methodist Evangelistic Team. The name was later changed to Methodist Evangelical Team, with Bro J.K Udensi who was before this time the Enugu Township Scripture Union pilgrim group's President as the Coordinator of Enugu/Umuahia Evangelical team. Under this umbrella town like Uturu, Enugu, Abakiliki and Port Harcourt were reached. As it is in the practice of this group, any place they visited they established an Evangelical team and followed the people up for one year and six months as the case may be. Of the outreaches, the Umuagbai Outreach was the most elaborate.

It was tagged "Umuagbai 85".<sup>29</sup> The outreach was in response to a clarion call from the Diocese of Port Harcourt to the Archdiocese of Enugu that the team should come over and help to evangelize the area, because they had heard the great news of what God was doing in the Archdiocese of Enugu. The call came from the Diocesan Bishop, through the then Archbishop of Enugu Most Rev. J.N.Dimoji. The Team's link-up man was the then Rev G.A Agupusi now Bishop of Abakiliki who at that time was serving at Umuagbai. The arrangement was finally fixed, from 1<sup>st</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> of August 1985, Venue – Umuagbai, Ndoki Circuit. All the Evangelical Team members from the Archdiocese of Enugu were to come. Also, the host Diocese was asked to mobilize her members to come.

Weeks before the Crusade/Outreach, extensive radio and television announcements were mounted so massively that everyone wondered what the Methodist was up to. The organizers of

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<sup>29</sup> Elder R.N. Okocha, I interviewed him in his house at World Bank Housing Estate Umuahia, July, 2008

the crusade applied to the Nigeria Railway Corporation for a special train service, which the Corporation approved. This, in the history of the country, is the first of such concession from the Railway Corporation. On the arrival date, the special train set off from Enugu early that morning, stopping at every station big or small, picking up only the Methodist bound for the outreach. Every body between Enugu and Port Harcourt was picked. Another concession was also made by the Nigeria Railway Corporation to permit the train stop at Kom-kom a mere level crossing for the convenience of the campers. The delegates from there were transferred by road to Umuagbai. There were several dozens of Shell B.P and the River State luxurious buses already waiting. The mass- transit exercise, which began about 9pm continued till about 3am the following morning and the train stood still at the level crossing, until all her passengers were completely transferred to the venue by road.

On arrival at Umuagbai, the crowd had grown out of proportion and canopies were used in the open field as no hall could accommodate the people so gathered. Though there was shortage of proper accommodation for the staggering number of people, the spirit prevailing was rather so high that brethren slept in the open spaces. It is worth mentioning that the Host Bishop, Rt Rev J.B. Poromon, with his entire family camped with the brethren. He showed the brethren great hospitality to the point of slaughtering a giant cow as a welcome gesture to his visitors. Another exciting experience of 'Umuagbai 85' was the question of medium of communication. The area has a multi – lingual setting. So, the organizers made the people to sit in their various languages grouping, so that interpretation could be made easily to them from English language. Apart from the open-air services, other programmes included- Drama by Aba drama wing, choruses by the live band, Choir renditions, Healing/Deliverance hour, Bible studies and seminars. More than 5,000 campers were registered, besides those attending from their homes. The follow up as

I have noted before was carried out with great sacrifice and it lasted for months. Follow up teachers were going from Aba. The train in the same manner took the campers home at the close of the program.

So many great miracles happened in the course of these outreaches, people received the Holy Ghost baptism and they spoke in tongues, others were empowered for Mission with the manifestations of spiritual gifts, healings and deliverance were administered to the people through the power of the Holy Spirit. Specially, among them include what happened in Abakiliki. While the preaching was going on, a mad woman came to disturb. The prayer squad took her off, prayed for her and she was set free. The clan head confirmed that the lady had been mad for three years, and was violent. She was bound with chains for the rest of two years, making her period of demon possession five years<sup>30</sup>. Another similar event was in Owerri, where a young man was delivered of madness. Today he is a Methodist minister, doing well in his station.<sup>31</sup> Wherever these evangelicals went, there were testimonies of salvation, deliverance and real joy in the Holy Ghost. Many caught the fire of the Holy Ghost and this brought about new dimensions in their operations.

### **National Structure of Methodist Evangelical Movement.**

The reforms adopted by Methodist Church Nigeria in 1976 created crises that divided the church into two. Some faction remained with 1962 foundation constitution while the other group accepted the new reformed 1976 constitution. Within the 1962 faction of the crises, existed Evangelical groups both in Aba and Umuahia. In Aba they answered “Soul winners

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<sup>30</sup> She was clothed after her deliverance and she has since been enjoying her marital home, her pictures were taken. I saw them while doing this research at the collections of some old MEM leaders.

<sup>31</sup> Isaac Ogbonna., was the leader of the prayer wing that handled the case, he told me of that during the interview.

groups” with bro. C.O.Nwamuo as their lay leader and the then Rev Nelson Eke now retired Archbishop of Okigwe Arch Diocese, who came from an evangelical background as the minister. In Umuahia, they answered Revival groups. But their activities were not as elaborate as that of the 1976 faction, which we have seen. As we have noted earlier, some of these evangelicals or revivalists belonged to S.U pilgrim group. At the Church levels, they were divided but whenever they came to SU fellowship they saw themselves as brothers and sisters. And during official SU programmes, when people needed to be recognized along their denominational lines, these Methodists stood up as members of Methodist Church.<sup>32</sup> Some of them began to ask questions “since at the SU level, we see ourselves as one, can’t we forget the politics of our leaders and start meeting as all Methodist evangelicals?” They agreed and met both at Aba and Ihube as revivalists of both factions of the Church. During their Ihube meeting/prayers Rev .O.Oladele, a delegate from the Western brethren came. He informed the Eastern brethren that in the general meeting of the Fellowship of Evangelical groups in the west (APAPO EGBE AJIHINRERE) held at Gbongam in 1981, it was made known that some evangelical groups were also functioning well in Methodist churches in the Eastern Nigeria. That the meeting mandated him (Rev. Oladele) and Brother Lanre Fakolade to help in linking up with them, as that was why he came. The joy of the brethren knew no bounds and they shared fellowship together. At the end of the fellowship, the leaders had serious business meeting with their guest and in that meeting, it was discovered to the surprise of everyone that there was a spontaneous move of God all over the Conference area. The meeting decided to link up with all these groups.

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<sup>32</sup> Ernest Onyekwu , Minister for Evangelism, Archdiocese of Umuahia, interviewed in his office in July, 2008.



Sequel to this development a meeting of all coordinators of Evangelical fellowships in Methodist church Nigeria was called by Rev. O. Femi Oladele and Bro. J.K. Udensi on 16<sup>th</sup> November, 1985 at Jesus College, Otukpo, in response to the yearning and desire of Christians in Methodist church Nigeria actively involved in evangelism to have a national forum for proper co-ordination of all evangelical work in the church. During this meeting, as the brethren were praying and having fellowship, the Lord gave them a revelation. A member saw two mountains with their tops far from each other. A voice said bring the mountain tops together, the person asked how could I do this, since they are far away from each other. The voice answered that when the base of each touches the other, that the world would be surprised at the speed with which the tops would come together. The interpretation was given right in the prayers session. The brethren prayed out their heart out and were encouraged to continue serving God in the Church as one body, after which God would force the leadership of the two Methodist factions to unite. This crucial meeting which was attended by nineteen (19) delegates paved the way for the inauguration of the National Congress of Evangelizing Methodists (NACEM) by his Grace the Most Rev. (Dr.) J.N. Dimoji, the Archbishop of Enugu on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1986. He acted as a member of this group not on his capacity as a church functionary. This inauguration ceremony and first meeting of the congress attracted seventy-four (74) delegates from all over the country.

The participants prayed and thanked God for directing them to first meet on the 16<sup>th</sup> day of November 1985, at Jesus College, Otukpo, and for leading them by words of prophecy to move in line with His directions. Official executives were elected in the persons of brother Paul E. Udenyi as the National Coordinator. J.K. Udensi the Assistant National Coordinator, brother Maduebibisi Iwe as the National Secretary, and brother E.O. Kanu as the assistant National

Secretary. Brother D.O. Akande became the Financial Secretary, while brother Okwoli Ulegbe was the Treasurer and brother David Ajayi the Prayer Secretary. Rt. Rev. Ayo Ladigbolu, the Conference coordinator for Evangelism in 1986 reported to Conference, the formation of evangelical teams who are effectively mobilizing Methodist members for evangelism, and strengthening the evangelistic outreach and ministry of the Church. He also informed Conference that when all the details are worked out, this body will formally seek official recognition and blessing of Conference.<sup>33</sup>

### **INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF MEM**

Two evangelical bodies presented their different agendas for evangelism before the 1988 Conference. One was NACEM which we have traced its history, and the second was Methodist Evangelism Association of NIGERIA (MEAN). In the context of this two bodies seeking recognition, the Conference expressed the need for an all-embracing evangelistic body for Methodist Church Nigeria. The Conference consequently came up with a name Methodist Evangelical Movement (MEM) as a unifying name. Let us briefly look at the history of the MEAN.

The world Methodist Council through its Institute of World Evangelism in 1983 held seminar in Nairobi Kenya for East Africans in keeping with their vision and determination to spread the revival within the Methodist body. Two people represented Methodist Church Nigeria. In 1986 from 29<sup>th</sup> December to 16<sup>th</sup> January 1987, they hosted the West African Seminar at Accra, Ghana, so many Diocesan Evangelism coordinators attended the programme. After the Accra seminar, members agreed to establish Methodist Fellowship for Evangelization in West Africa

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<sup>33</sup> Minutes of 1986 Methodist Church Nigeria Conference p 25.

(MFEWA) and asked the different West African Methodist Conferences to approve it. The Nigeria coordinator of evangelism in the person of Rt. Rev. L.S.A Ladigbolu now Retired Archbishop served on the faculty of this seminar and presented the request from Accra to the Conference that held that year in 1987. That same Conference in one of her resolutions considered as a matter of urgency, the appointment of a full-time Evangelist who will also direct the outreach and evangelistic programmes of Conference.

The proposal sailed through the West African Conferences and in 1987, MFEWA was born. On the leadership of this body was Very Rev Titilayo Fatoyinbo as Chairman, Mrs. Regina Adu as the Treasure and K. Asamoah-Okyere became the Secretary. The sole aim was to facilitate Methodist evangelization in West Africa. MFEWA held her inaugural seminar at the Institute of Church and Society in Ibadan from 2<sup>nd</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> December 1987. Dr. Aboagye-Mensah from Ghana, who later served as a Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Conference Ghana. Pastor Babsmale and Rev Dr. Joseph S. Ayayi led the plenary sessions. Delegates came from Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria. At the end of MFEWA inaugural seminar, the Very Rev Okon Ekerendu who was then teaching at Methodist Theological Institute Umuahia and who also serves as the Umuahia Diocesan coordinator of Evangelism, Moses Fatoyinbo and Rev Dr. Joseph S. Ayayi who just came back from Perkins School of theology, Southern Methodist University at Dallas, Texas USA and was posted to the Methodist Theological Institute, Sagmu as lecturer. Three of them reflected on how to keep the vision alive and how to follow up MFEWA seminar experience adequately in Methodist Church Nigeria. That year the Outreach/Evangelism Committee sent this resolution to 1988 Conference:

1. That a Methodist Evangelism Association of Nigeria (MEAN) be inaugurated and that the aim of the Association shall be to facilitate Methodist Revival and Evangelism in Nigeria.
2. That the inaugural seminar be held in one of our theological Institutes, during one of the institute's holidays and that the participants at the inaugural seminar shall be 'Fire' Evangelism leaders from each Diocese – two minister and three lay persons.
3. That we believed that these are the days of dream and visions of what God can and would do again in and through the Methodist family. We do believe that all over the world, the spirit of Revival and Evangelism is moving and the people called Methodists should not be left out.

In order to achieve this vision they formed a group called AMEN – Association of Methodist Evangelism of Nigeria, hoping to involve all shades of Methodists in seminar.

It was to this same Conference that NACEM submitted its operational guidelines. One thing we must note here is that MAEN was made up of ministers and coordinators of Evangelism from the different Dioceses but NACEM was constituted with grassroots lay members. MEAN was not on ground and had not been actively involved at the local levels but at the international levels. The need for an all embracing body was obvious and the name Methodist Evangelical Movement (MEM) came up and was approved by the 1989 Methodist Church Nigeria Conference as an all embracing body that will co-ordinate evangelistic activities within Methodist Church Nigeria. Very Rev. Okon Ekerendu who was at this time serving as the Regional Secretary for West Africa in the World Evangelism Committee of the World Methodist Council was made also the part time Director of Evangelism and both Very Rev. Titi Fatoyinbo and Rev J.S. Ajayi assisted him.

On 25<sup>th</sup> January 1989, seven evangelists arrived from the United States and were received by the Very Rev. Okon A Ekerendu, the Part time Director of Evangelism who also read the welcome address. The evangelists were prayerfully paired up to different Archdiocese as follows.

- (a) Rev. Scolt Kelfo and Rev. Frank Beard to the Archdiocese of Calabar from Jan 27-Feb 17.
- (b) Rev Cecil Williamson and Rev Charles Dennis to the Archdiocese of Enugu from Jan 27 to Feb 16.
- (c) Mr. Hugl Maclellam to the Archdiocese of Ilesa Jan 27-Feb 7
- (d) Rev Mehim Leach and Mr Gay Nermant to the Archdiocese of Lagos from Jan 27-Feb 7.

At the end of these programmes, they reported that there was great need for the Conference of Methodist Church Nigeria to have a full time Evangelist for the effective evangelistic work of the Church in Nigeria. On this, Cecil Williamson's ministry promised the initial sponsorship of a full time Conference Evangelist. After the unification of the church and ratification of the new constitution, which came up on May 24, 1990, the church appointed a full-time Director of Evangelism with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> of August 1990, in the person of Rev Dr. Ajayi. Cecil Williamson fulfilled his promise and sponsored the initial take off of the department. He also, with the leadership of MEM, embarked on a seven-day revival in each of the 36 Dioceses with the planting of churches, According to Rev Issac Ogbanna,<sup>34</sup> in the North 19 churches, at Ibadan 22 churches, Owerri 22, Nnewi 10 churches and Igede 10 churches.

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<sup>34</sup> Isaac Ogbonna, I recorded the interview on a tape when he granted me interview in July 2008.

The inauguration of the Methodist Evangelical Movement (MEM) came up from 7<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> August 1990. A meeting of the operators of NACEM and MEM met and drafted the MEM Constitution on June 1991. MEM held her first National Convention on Sept. 4-10, 1993. The theme of the convention was: **REVIVE US O LORD**. Since then, once every three years MEM National convention is planned.

### **ACTIVITIES OF MEM IN THE LOCAL CHURCHES FROM 1980 - 2009**

From the second half of the decade of the 1970s and 1980s, MEM groups called by several names were formed within the Church for Bible study, prayer meeting and aggressive evangelism, moving from one town to the other as we have seen. These activities were expected to deepen the spiritual lives of the participant and consequently the Church as a whole. These renewal efforts continued in various local churches in the Conference area throughout the 1980s. It is assumed at this time that the people who belonged to MEM were better Christians than the people who did not. More groups were established in different localities in the country. Although, this development guaranteed a steady membership in the church as many of those who were leaving the Church for other new religious movements found a resemblance of what they are looking for in MEM. Hence MEM brought Pentecostal influence closer to the churches. The older members of the Church became annoyed by claims and accusation by MEM members that worship services in the local Churches were very lukewarm. They claimed that prayers were weak and not lively enough. Miracles do not happen and the Holy Spirit does not baptize people and neither are they able to speak in tongues. By the late 1980s, some Churches were taking steps either to completely ban these groups from operating among them or disallow them from using their facilities to host their programmes. It

was at this time that the leadership of MEM began to curtail some of the excesses among their members and also to have open discussions with churches, quarterly meetings and Synods.

MEM members and other Church members who have had contacts with Pentecostal spirituality, in their preaching and teaching presented pentecostal spirituality as found in MEM as the only means of renewal in Methodist Church Nigeria. In response to this, oppositions increased from Bishops, Presbyters and Local Church Ministers towards the MEM members. By this time, the issue of all night prayer meetings, deliverance services, casting out of demons, slaying in the spirit and speaking in tongues were being reported to Quarterly meetings and Synods, as Un-Methodist activities. Talks were organized in MEM meetings on how to live and work peacefully in the churches and also encouraged MEM members to stop sitting on the fringes of the church but to go in and take up offices and enroll in the lay Preaching ministry of the Church. This was the first systematic attempt to approach the Pentecostal upsurge with understanding. Despite the move by top MEM members to be actively involved in the leadership of the church, some associations and individuals continued to act with panic and responded with general condemnation of the Pentecostal spirituality, which MEM was advocating.

Official response to the Pentecostal upsurge was never coordinated, until 1990 hence the spread of the revival. Now from the advantage of hindsight, it appears the various leadership of the Church did not appreciate the charismatic renewal as a revivalist movement, and some did not consider change as necessary for religious progress. One of such panicky measures was the instruction issued by a Bishop in Okigwe diocese in Eastern Nigeria, around 1995. The said Bishop announced that if one is not wearing earrings and necklaces and one is not accepting the

belief in infant baptism, one will not be confirmed as a member in the Methodist Church. That same year, the bishop disallowed a member from being confirmed at a confirmation service within the Diocese on the ground that the lady was not wearing earrings. On hearing this, the leadership MEM in the Diocese of Okigwe instructed all MEM members in the Diocese to stay off from all activities of the church. Later they asked their members to go to church but not to take part in the offering, Holy Communion, tithe and other acts of support to the church. Church workers in the Diocese were owed for sometime because, it was observed that MEM members were among the faithful tithe paying members and since they stopped, the income of the church went down drastically. Coincidentally, that was the year Okigwe Diocese hosted the Bishops Council and these MEM members carried placards and went to the venue of the meeting in order to register their annoyance. Apart from the issue of putting on earrings and necklaces, the other area of disagreement or other controversial issues or things the leadership of the church considered as new teaching or Un-Methodist practices includes, shouting during prayers, foot stamping and fingers snapping at prayers sessions followed by sentimental responses like “yes,” it shall be done” “Jesus”, weeping and rolling on the ground during prayers, holding separate prayer meeting while the church is holding one in the sanctuary, night vigil, praying for the gifts of the Holy Spirit so that one would be able to speak in tongues as it happened to the apostles on the day of Pentecost. Moving about or jerking or throwing hands about while praying, claims of seeing visions or having prophecies and spasmodic interjection of phrases such as ‘praise the Lord’, Amen’, blood of Jesus while worship is going on. The excessive use of choruses to the neglect of hymns and some Christians calling themselves “brothers or sisters”.



## **The Reposition of Methodist Church Nigeria along Charismatic lines**

In July 4, 2003, the General Purpose Committee of Methodist Church Nigeria in full realization of the urgent need to reposition the Church to cope with current realities set up a committee known as and called “The Strategic Planning Team.(SPT)” The team was to examine where the church was, where it is now, where it hopes to be and how to get there. After several months of research, studies, interactive sessions and retreats, the SPT came up with a report that identified problems and weaknesses in the church and then proffered solutions. These problems, which have bedeviled the church, include:

1. Dwindling membership which arose largely from uncoordinated and ineffective evangelism /spiritual development programmes across the conference area.
2. Many members are not getting spiritual fulfillment from the church and there is lack of genuine unity as well as spiritual and financial commitment to the church.
3. Many members, especially the youth as a result of the above have started to migrate to other churches while a large percentage of those remaining are lukewarm in their attitudes i.e. not paying sufficient attention to Bible study, Revival services, prayer meetings, fasting or other spiritual development programmes.
4. The church total population is far from being satisfactory when compared to the total Christian population in the Country.
5. There is a poor appreciation of the goodness of the Lord by most members resulting in general insincerity in payment and remittance of tithes and seed of faith. The church is thus unable to fund its theological institutions and evangelism programmes adequately.

The recommendation of the team were considered critically and exhaustively and then adopted after necessary amendments by the 39<sup>th</sup> / 4<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference held in Kaduna, in August 2004. The conference therefore came up with these conclusions:

- (a) Setting the vision of the church “To be the largest and most spiritual vibrant church in Nigeria” and
- (b) The mission to be “To consistently win more souls for Christ, develop spiritually fulfilled members and remain very active in serving humanity”.

In order to achieve this vision and accomplish the mission, the Conference approved

- (1) To give topmost priority to evangelism by allocating not less than 20% of the church’s annual budget to it, at all levels of governance.
- (2) As a policy, every member is requested to bring in at least another new member per quarter. This is expected to grow the population of the Church to about 20 million in 10 years.
- (3) A massive training programme for Evangelists Revivalists at all Diocesan level will be embarked upon.
- (4) Soul winning shall be the target for appraising the performance of ministers/Evangelists.
- (5) Every newly Commissioned minister shall be posted to establish a church.
- (6) A local church is also required to establish a new church / preaching station every 2 years.

In order to develop spiritually-fulfilled members, Bible study and attendance at all spiritual gatherings are now compulsory, especially for church leaders. The Headquarters will be publishing quarterly Bible study guides, which will be used all over the Conference area. Church liturgy shall be modified to a uniform standard to accommodate all the fruits of the

Spirit. Altar calls, testimonies, manifestation of the Spirit, shall be regular features. Spiritual development programmes shall be put in place for all recognized groups in the church to make them more effective. Youths in particular shall be encouraged to become church workers, Lay preachers, Revivalist etc. and the use of electronic media i.e. TV and Radio shall be more frequent.

Also on Evangelism, they re-organized the Evangelism department and made it a Directorate having a Bishop in charge of it at the Headquarters. They equally saw the need to insist on minister and lay leaders at various levels of the church identifying closely with all evangelical programmes of the church and non-compliance to attract sanctions. Practices like giving testimonies, using anointing oil in a spiritually guided manner, vigils, class meetings, bible studies and the establishment of Youth churches was accepted as norms in the church. The Conference further decided that superiors will appraise ministers and grant them annual increments on the basis of their performance on evangelism among other criteria.

They also observed that the weak Headquarters of Methodist Church Nigeria has not helped the church to achieve the right level of cohesion and positioning for vibrant growth. Part of the change the Conference decided to make was to reorganize the structure to strengthen the connexional system and make it more unified. There were put in place three Directorates that will report directly to the Prelate. They are:

1. Directorate of Finance and Administration this will be headed by a Bishop, who is also the Secretary of Conference and he oversees the general Administration of the Headquarter, Interchurch relations, staff matters, management of conference funds and organizing the Bi-annual conference.

2. Directorate of Evangelism and Discipleship the Directorate is headed by a Bishop and shall be responsible for liturgy and spiritual development, coordination of ministerial training, coordination of preaching plans and other literatures of the church. He also supervises the various organs of the church.
3. The Directorate of planning, Research and services. They are catering among other things the coordination of church expansion programmes, logistics and investment monitoring, health care/welfare institutions, educational and investment institution.
4. Conference connexional Council made up the Prelate, Archbishop, Archdiocesan Lay Presidents, the Conference Secretary and the Bishop Evangelism replaced the G.P.C. This Committee is responsible for the day to day supervision of the church.

At the end, Conference directed that a new constitution should be put in place with the new vision of the Church, which is to be one of the largest and spiritually vibrant Churches in Nigeria with the Mission to consistently win souls for Christ, develop spiritual fulfilled members and remain very active in serving humanity. The committee to review the existing Constitution was given terms of reference, which include re-examining all the suggestions made so as to build in the current thrust of the Church. The 40<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference in 2006 ratified and adopted the new Constitution. Also at the Uyo Conference, Most Rev S. Ola Makinde was elected the Prelate, Rt. Rev. C.R. Opoko the Conference Secretary while Very Rev. Dr. S.N. Onuoha was elected the Connexional Secretary for Evangelism/Discipleship. The Directorate of Evangelism and discipleship organized her first National convention in 2009 at Sagamu, Ogun State. The high point of the convention was the anointing service. The Prelate

came with olive oil, blessed it and asked participants to come along and be anointed for breakthroughs. Many were rushing forward to touch, rub and witness the breakthrough oil. Also on the first day of the convention, while the Prelate was welcoming the participants, he pointed to a big wooden cross made with a newly cut trunk, just in its raw form, placed at the convention stage. He said who ever looks at this cross or touches it will receive answers to his/her prayers. Through out the free hours of the convention, people were seen praying around it, touching it, wailing and laying on its foot, hoping that the God of the Methodist people will answer them and give them break through in life.

The Pentecostal spirituality and emphasis on symbols and rituals are gradually becoming official standards of the church. The orientations of the church are changing in favor of the Charismatics. All the ethos and practices of Charismatic Movement, like use of chorus in a divine service with the use of musical instruments, Crusades, Revival Services, Night Vigils and allowing prophesies during official church programs are now normalized and accepted as Methodist practice. In many renewal services, official church agents encouraged members to come along with galloons/bottles of water for blessing and prayers. Many came with Olive Oil and gallons of water to such events with hope that these sacramentals will ward off demons, bring success and draw down the favor of God. For the first three days of every month, renewal programs have equally been instituted by the current leadership of the Church and observed across the nation. These programmes, are believed, will continually renew the Church along the Charismatic lines. Many of the practices of the Charismatic Movement are today seen and practiced in the Church. But the question we are to ask is whether these influences and new landscape have stopped the exodus of members to the established Pentecostal Churches. Whether members are now more fulfilled with the new form or worship or whether there are

still some things members continue to yearn for and cherish in the older form of liturgy that are currently being jettisoned.

## **Conclusion**

Worship in Methodist Church Nigeria has changed so much that visitors often mistake some Methodist services to that of a Charismatic group. The groundwork for this change had begun in the late 1980s as many brothers from MEM were accepting the call and entering into the Methodist ministry and those already in ministry rising to leadership positions. These were people who have been steeped in the ethos of Charismatic renewal. Hence this class of people whom the churches have complained about as peddling un-Methodist practices soon became the vanguard for the rejuvenation of Methodist Church Nigeria. By the end of the twentieth century the influence of the renewal in the Methodist Church has become overwhelming and lasting. While the ministers and generality of Methodist people were initially skeptical and reacted negatively to the spread of the renewal, the attitude had long changed. It is of interest to note that official organs of the Church now advertise this charismatic ethos, which MEM earlier had projected.

MEM displays almost the same features that one can observe among Charismatics elsewhere. Their style of worship that encourages spontaneity, dancing, clapping and more time for praise and worship in their liturgy, they make room for high lay participation, healing, dreams and testimonies. All these styles of worship conform to the general features of the worldwide charismatic movement. Therefore MEM as renewal movement in Nigeria exemplifies the African expression of the Worldwide Charismatic Movement. The origin of MEM in Methodist Church Nigeria is traced to local initiatives. The implication of this development is that, through MEM activities in Methodist Church Nigeria, we learnt how local Christians in Nigeria

have taken their own initiative to appropriate the Western inherited form of Christianity to suit local needs, within the framework of the mainline churches. This means that if the mainline churches have long articulated a response on how to solve and face peculiar African problems, fears and challenges, for which they were found wanting, we would here experienced fewer schisms.

Theological MEM as charismatic renewal in Africa/Nigeria is unique because it perfectly fits into the African primal worldview. It represents continuity between the traditional religions of Africa and this interface of the Biblical and African worldviews has resulted according to late Ogbu Kalu in a peculiar form of Christianity exhibited by African Charismatics.<sup>35</sup> Another theological consideration of the uniqueness of MEM is the centrality that victory of Christ assumes among them. Christ as the victorious one is given a new meaning among MEM members, which makes them quite distinct. It means Christ has victory over all powers of evil (human and supernatural) and the overwhelming socioeconomic problems that stare them in the face. Africa Christians tend to put more emphasis on holistic approach to Salvation, which has more leaning on this world. This orientation is due to the African concept of salvation, which includes, healing, success in life, material prosperity, ability to deal with evil and procreation in the here and now. Charismatics are rooted in African culture in the sense that they respond to specific spiritual needs of Africans. The Charismatic renewal thus enables participants to express their deepest religious longings.

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<sup>35</sup> Ogbu Kalu, *Power, Poverty, and Prayer: The Challenges of Poverty and Pluralism in African Christianity 1960-1996* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000), 104

Nevertheless, salvation of the soul equally comes to the fore among the teachings of MEM. This balance is one feature that distinguishes MEM from contemporary independent, Neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches in Nigeria, who over emphasize “this worldliness” phase of salvation. MEM is able to maintain a balance owing to two factors, firstly, MEM background in the theological orientation of Methodism, which is more inclined to the futuristic dimension of Salvation. Secondly, as we established in this study almost all the leaders of MEM were brought up from scripture Union that traditionally overtly emphasizes “Soul salvation” or “New birth. Richard Foli had included Institutionalization as one of the hindrances to church growth. He has this to say:

A number of reasons may be assigned for this. One reason is that spontaneity is gradually replaced by structure. It could be the case that at the early stages of the church, both the leadership and membership are generally zealous and want to see growth of the church. The attitude is that of having everybody on board, lending the necessary support to one another. The developing church is open to new ideas and accepts voluntary initiative and contribution of the generality of membership. Things are done, because of a voluntary impulse from within. Service rendered in and for Church are spontaneous.<sup>36</sup>

This is true of MEM. As MEM develops and institutionalized, spontaneity gradually gives way to structure. People now became concerned with the way in which things are done in an organized way and struggles to conform to established traditions. Attention gradually shifts from the main focus of the mission to things of secondary importance. Appointments from all level of the Church are now made not considering the initial vision and dream of the pioneers. The self-sacrifice that characterized this group is fast weaning and the movement has lost its lay orientation.

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<sup>36</sup> Richard Foli, *Christianity in Ghana: A comparative Church Growth Study*. (Accra: Trust Publications 2006), 240