

**PENTECOSTAL PROFITS:**  
**THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH**

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#### Abstract:

This study explores the link between the development of the so-called prosperity gospel and the explosive growth of Pentecostalism in the Global South. It examines the evolution of the prosperity gospel as a strand of Pentecostalism in its country of origin, the United States. It then investigates the dramatic acceptance of the theology in selected pockets of the Pacific Rim, Latin America and Africa. Specific exemplars of the theology — famous pastors or burgeoning new denominations — are scrutinized and their methodologies for missionizing are probed. The study also touches on the theology's impact on the rest of Christianity and on some other religions in the Global South. The reasons for the success of the theology in the Global South are considered. They point to the surprising conclusion that the prosperity gospel is not new, but old, and that it resonates with religious impulses that precede all of the world religions.

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## ACCRONYMS

AIC	African Independent Church
DOMI	David Oyedepo Ministries International
FGBMFI	Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International
NASFAT	Nasrul-Lahi-Fatih-Society
PFN	Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria
RCCG	Redeemed Christian Church of God
UCKG	Universal Church of the Kingdom of God

Comprehending the prosperity gospel might be the most pressing task of anyone trying to study the changing shape of global Christianity.

Philip Jenkins<sup>1</sup>

The Lord is my banker: I shall not owe.  
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:  
He restoreth my loss: He leadeth me beside still waters.  
Yea though I walk in the valley of the shadow of debt,  
I will fear no evil, for thou art with me;  
Thy silver and thy gold, they rescue me;  
Thou preparest a way for me in the presence of my business competitors;  
Thou anointed my head with oil, my cup runneth over.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life  
And I shall do business in the name of the Lord. Amen.

Dr. D.K.Olukoya<sup>2</sup>

The pastor replaced the witch doctor.

Ogbu Kalu<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Jenkins, "The Case for prosperity," *The Christian Century* 127, no. 24 (2010): 45.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. D. K. Olukoya is the head of Mountain of Fire Miracles Ministries, a Pentecostal denomination in Nigeria. For additional insight into Dr. Olukoya's creative exegesis of Psalm 23 see, Nimi Wariboko, "Pentecostal Paradigms of National Economic Prosperity in Africa," in *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socio-Economics of the Global Charismatic Movement*, eds. Katherine Attanasi and Amos Yong (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 39.

<sup>3</sup> Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 114.

## INTRODUCTION

### **Before Lifting the Curtain**

The word “Pentecostal” conjures up a myriad of images and terms such as holy rollers, speaking in tongues, vibrant singing and lately, Sarah Palin. Before lifting the curtain on this thesis it is appropriate to define the term, “Pentecostal.” Pentecostals take their name from the story described in the Acts of the Apostles which saw the Holy Spirit descend on the Apostles and their disciples in the upper room of a Jerusalem dwelling. The original theological tenets of Pentecostalism included salvation, divine healing, glossolalia and millenarianism. As Pentecostalism evolved new strands of theology have been added and accepted by some facets within the orbit of this now dynamic movement. The most striking example of this development is the so called “prosperity gospel” which promises financial success to believers. Many observers consider the remarkable growth of Pentecostalism as the most significant religious phenomenon of the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> For too many others, however, Pentecostals are ignored, overlooked, or underestimated. As this thesis will demonstrate, not apprehending or understanding the ramifications of twenty-first century Pentecostalism is an oversight with major implications.

### **Pentecostalism: The Less-Than-Obvious Phenomenon**

Connecting the dots is difficult to do, particularly if you don’t even see the dots. So it is with the dramatic growth of Pentecostalism, from a fringe group of Topeka, Kansas, Wesleyan-Holiness seekers just over a century ago, to a more than six hundred million-strong tidal wave of devotees who, while they comprise one quarter of

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<sup>4</sup> One such scholar is Harvard professor, Harvey Cox. See *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995).



Christianity or approximately one in twelve people on the planet, go largely unnoticed in Europe or North America.<sup>5</sup> This is because the majority of Pentecostals live in the Global South, in the developing nations of Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Most of the meteoric increase in Pentecostalism has occurred over the last forty years, a period of time that coincides with the adoption of the so-called prosperity gospel as an additional strand in Pentecostal theology. Of the recently expanding cadre of academics and journalists who investigate Pentecostalism, only a few have made the connection between the explosion of Pentecostal practitioners and the spread of the prosperity gospel. This occurs because many investigators study only certain aspects of Pentecostalism and do not appreciate its manifold nuances, preferring to ascribe to all six hundred million adherents characteristics that apply to just a segment of the movement. The thesis of this study is that there is a significant connection between the popularity of the prosperity gospel and the strong surge in Pentecostal expansion, and not only has the prosperity gospel driven Pentecostal growth during the last four decades, but it is, as Philip Jenkins recently suggested, impacting the shape of global Christianity.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Three Waves of Pentecostalism**

Scholars have come to accept the heuristic model that sees Pentecostalism developing in three waves.<sup>7</sup> The first wave began with the Azusa Street revival of 1906 in Los Angeles. Pentecostals who trace their origin back to Azusa Street are termed “classical Pentecostals.” The second wave of Pentecostalism began early in the 1960s

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<sup>5</sup> Stephen Prothero, *God Is Not One: The Eight Religions That Run the World—and Why Their Differences Matter* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 89.

<sup>6</sup> Philip Jenkins, “The case for prosperity,” *The Christian Century* 127, no. 24 (2010): 45.

<sup>7</sup> For an extensive explanation of the three waves of Pentecostalism, see Michael Di Giacomo, “Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in Canada: Its Origins, Development, and Distinct Culture, in *Canadian Pentecostalism: Transition and Transformation*, ed. Michael Wilkinson, (Montreal McGill-Queens University Press, 2009), 16-21.

among some scattered parishes in the United States-based Episcopalian denomination, before spilling over into other mainline Protestant churches, as well as into Catholicism. These Pentecostal-style worshippers, who have remained inside their respective denominations, have been termed “charismatics.” The third wave of Pentecostals, usually labeled as “neo-Pentecostals,” emerged in the 1970s, and was identified by large, loosely affiliated, independent (or non-denominational) churches. All three waves began in the United States and quickly spread around the Christian world. While precise numbers are difficult to determine, there is a scholarly consensus that classical Pentecostals number around one hundred million practitioners, charismatics approach the two hundred million figure, and the fastest growing segment of the movement, neo-Pentecostals, top the three hundred million mark.<sup>8</sup>

### **Some Trends in Scholarship about Pentecostalism**

The existing academic literature on Pentecostalism provides an uneven body of work. During the first seventy years of its existence, Pentecostalism received scant attention from academics, and what was written concerned the movement in the United States. Theologians from inside the tradition began publishing articles in *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society of Pentecostal Studies* in 1970. In the larger academic world the first noteworthy book was published in 1979, by historian Robert Mapes Anderson. Entitled *Vision of the Disinherited: The Makings of American Pentecostalism*, this seminal work traced Pentecostalism’s roots in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition of the late

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<sup>8</sup>Veli-Matti Karkkainen, introduction to *The Spirit in the World: Emerging Pentecostal Theologies in Global Contexts*, ed. Veli-Matti Karkkainen (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), xvi.

nineteenth century to the depression era of the 1930s.<sup>9</sup> The next major work by an American academic was *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century*.<sup>10</sup> Published in 1995 by Harvard Divinity School professor Harvey Cox, this book focused primarily on the emergence of Pentecostalism in the United States. Cox did, however, acknowledge the growing global clout of the movement by including chapters on its influence in Latin America and in South Korea. As for the prosperity gospel, Cox made only a passing reference to the new theology, speaking derogatorily about “name-it and claim-it” preachers.<sup>11</sup>

One of the first serious academic works about the impact of Pentecostalism outside of the United States was penned by the London School of Economics sociologist, David Martin, who in 1990 published *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America*.<sup>12</sup> Martin focused primarily on the growth of classical Pentecostalism that had taken place in Latin America since the 1960s, terming it “a quite extraordinary and little-known development.”<sup>13</sup> He did not, however, discuss neo-Pentecostalism or the prosperity gospel, which had already established a toehold in Latin America with the formation of denominations like the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. In 2002, building on his earlier regional study, Martin published *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish*.<sup>14</sup> This book, as the title implies, looked at the growth of Pentecostalism across

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<sup>9</sup>Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

<sup>10</sup>Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995).

<sup>11</sup>Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, 318.

<sup>12</sup>David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1990).

<sup>13</sup>Martin, *Tongues of Fire*, 1.

<sup>14</sup>David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002).

the globe and it is Martin, more than any other scholar, who has highlighted the transnational reach of the movement. In his latest book Martin offered this overview of Pentecostalism's appeal.

Pentecostalism finds its characteristic location among the aspiring poor, particularly women, seeking moral integration, security, modernity, and respect, above all in Latin America and Africa. It also flourishes in ethnic groupings in Latin America and Asia that have been historically overshadowed by the weight and power of larger civilizations, as the Maya have been by Spanish hegemony and the Koreans by China and Japan. Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity make considerable headway among the new transnational middle classes the world over, from Brazil to Nigeria and Singapore to Seoul.<sup>15</sup>

Martin aptly describes the emerging Pentecostal world, but his view is given from a perspective that still sees classical Pentecostalism as the driving force of the movement, and in doing so it discounts the overwhelming number of Global South worshippers who have been attracted to the neo-Pentecostal wing of the movement.

One of the first scholars to observe the international dimensions of the prosperity gospel was the British anthropologist Simon Coleman, who in the early 1990s began studying the Word of Life church in Uppsala, Sweden. In this church, founded in 1983 by Ulf Ekman, a graduate of the Kenneth Hagin's Rhema Bible School, Coleman saw a new brand of what he then termed "conservative Protestantism," which displayed a "growing consciousness of global interconnectedness" that was based on the use of modern communications technology and dispersed through "relatively tightly-knit networks of individuals and groups spread throughout the world."<sup>16</sup> These networks, according to Coleman, are reinforced by a feeling of "global interconnectedness" that has

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<sup>15</sup>David Martin, *The Future of Christianity: Reflections on Violence and Democracy, Religion and Secularization* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2011), 40-41.

<sup>16</sup>Simon Coleman, "Conservative Protestantism and the World Order: The Faith Movement in the United States and Sweden," *Sociology of Religion* 54, no. 4 (1993): 355.

developed in the wake of contemporary communications technology and the ease of modern travel.<sup>17</sup> Coleman continues to publish books and articles about this Swedish church and how it epitomizes the perceived modern, even cutting edge, nature of the prosperity gospel to its adherents. In his most recent article Coleman characterizes the prosperity message as “a religion made *to* travel but also a religion made *through* travel.”<sup>18</sup> This point has been made by another anthropologist, Joel Robbins, who by 2004 was also acknowledging that the charismatic and neo-Pentecostal waves of the movement were generally more educated than classical Pentecostals, and are “primarily from the established or emerging classes of the societies in which they are located.”<sup>19</sup> Robbins highlighted the conventional view from anthropology that academics who studied this movement needed to take into account both its international and local aspects, a perspective lacking from some academics who reduce Pentecostalism, particularly the prosperity gospel strand of neo-Pentecostalism, to strictly a capitalistic import from the United States.

During the last decade, British historian Philip Jenkins has written extensively about Christianity’s explosive growth in the Global South. His most notable publications were the 2002 book, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*<sup>20</sup> and the 2006 follow-up, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South*.<sup>21</sup> The strength of these two books is their emphasis on Christianity’s new centre

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<sup>17</sup>Coleman, “Conservative Protestantism and the World Order,” 355.

<sup>18</sup>Simon Coleman, “Only (Dis-)Connect: Pentecostal Global Networking as Revelation and Concealment,” *Religions* no. 4 (2013): 382, doi: 10.3390/re14030367.

<sup>19</sup> Joel Robbins, “The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33, no. 1 (2004): 122.

<sup>20</sup>Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>21</sup>Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

of gravity, which is not in Europe, but rather in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. Jenkins' focus is not on Pentecostalism, but rather the Christianity of the historic mission churches. Nevertheless he acknowledged in his first book on global Christianity that whether inside or outside these denominations, "Third World Christianity is becoming steadily more Pentecostal."<sup>22</sup> His books are also sprinkled with references to the Global South versions of the prosperity gospel and the flamboyant pastors of the churches that propound this new theology. His 2010 comment, quoted at the beginning of this thesis, shows that Jenkins has come to recognize (even though he has not emphasized it in his earlier books) that the prosperity gospel is not simply driving Pentecostal growth across the world, but it may be one of the most significant factors in shaping the Christianity of the Global South.

The writings of Martin, Coleman, Robbins and Jenkins will provide useful perspectives as this thesis unfolds. While they all reference Pentecostalism or the Global South to some degree, none of these acknowledged leaders in their fields focus on the impact of the prosperity gospel on Pentecostalism in the Global South. In fact, what has been written about the prosperity gospel to this date in relation to the growth of Pentecostalism, wherever it is found, has been tangential at best. For example, it was only during the writing of this thesis that the first ever book to examine the prosperity gospel in the US was produced. The author, Kate Bowler, a Canadian who teaches at the Duke University School of Divinity, published *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* in June of 2013.<sup>23</sup> In the same year, Australian philosopher Matthew

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<sup>22</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed. 2007), 78.

<sup>23</sup> Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Sharpe of Deakin University published an edited book entitled *Handbook of Research on Development and Religion*.<sup>24</sup> In this book Sharpe pens a chapter which appears to be his first foray into this field of Pentecostal studies. While not targeting the Global South, in “Name it and claim it: Prosperity Gospel and the global Pentecostal reformation,”<sup>25</sup> Sharpe does begin to address issues that will be more fully explored in this thesis, namely the link between the massive growth in Pentecostalism and the diffusion of the prosperity gospel.

As can be seen, there is growing awareness of the significance of the global Pentecostal community among academics. There are also now pockets of knowledge about the emerging influence of the prosperity gospel within Pentecostalism. What has not been attempted to this point, however, is a detailed survey of the prosperity gospel across the Global South, the area of the world where this theology has found most of its champions and adherents. This thesis will attempt, in a small way, to ameliorate this lacuna. It will begin with an examination of the prosperity gospel as it developed in the United States, its country of origin. From there it will show how the prosperity gospel has been adopted, utilized, and transformed in its three geographic strongholds, the Pacific Rim of Asia, Latin America, and sub-Saharan Africa. The limitations of space have caused the latter two regions of the Global South to be primarily explored through the two largest countries of those respective regions, namely Brazil and Nigeria. Finally, an attempt will be made to explore some of the reasons why the prosperity gospel has garnered such popularity in the Global South.

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<sup>24</sup> Mathew Sharpe, ed., *Handbook of Research on Development and Religion* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, Inc., 2013), 164-82.

<sup>25</sup> Mathew Sharpe, “Name it and claim it: Prosperity Gospel and the global Pentecostal reformation,” in *Handbook of Research on Development and Religion*, ed. Mathew Sharpe (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, Inc., 2013).

There are three important aspects to this study: the message, the messengers, and the audience receiving the message. Sufficient, though not plentiful, information has been written on the first two categories: the prosperity gospel itself and the amazing and often flamboyant religious entrepreneurs who preach this gospel. Unfortunately, comparatively little has been written about the millions of adherents who have come to practice the prosperity gospel in the Global South, or for that matter in the Western World. A few excellent ethnographies that study the devotees of the prosperity gospel have emerged, however, in the last decade, and from that information, where possible, the perspective of believers will be given voice.

Despite its growing prominence, relatively little has been written about Pentecostalism compared to other movements within Christianity, and within Pentecostalism there is a similar paucity about the prosperity gospel. Therefore, a distinctly Religious Studies approach has been adopted for examining the subject matter of this thesis. No specific theoretical approach will be utilized to frame this study, but the Religious Studies practice of utilizing a “wide assortment of perspectives and approaches” to ascertain understanding of a subject will be employed to its fullest.<sup>26</sup> By employing the Religious Studies convention of tapping into all the relevant disciplines of the academy, where sometimes obscure or off-handed references to the prosperity gospel can be unearthed, it becomes possible to produce a sweeping examination of this emerging international religious phenomenon.

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<sup>26</sup> Hillary Rodrigues and John S. Harding, *Introduction to The Study of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 12.



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE ORIGINS OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL

#### The Centrality of Kenneth Hagin to the Prosperity Gospel

As this thesis unfolds it will become apparent that there are many significant personalities in the development and spread of the prosperity gospel. There is, however, no individual who is more central or focal to the theology than Kenneth Hagin, which is why he is often termed the “father” of the movement.<sup>27</sup> The contentious question of whether he formulated the theology or plagiarised it from others will be explored, but no one can deny that it was Hagin who popularized what came to be termed the “Word-Faith” teachings.<sup>28</sup> There is no biography of Kenneth Hagin (1917-2003). There are, however, hundreds of references to his personal history in the books, articles and tapes that have been written, published and often re-written with edits, by Hagin and his ministry. These sources are used without question by Hagin’s protégés and acolytes, selectively by his many critics within the Evangelical and Pentecostal traditions, and cautiously by those journalists and academics who approach the subject of his life with supposed neutrality.

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<sup>27</sup> Most academics credit Hagin with being the “father” of the Word-Faith movement and the prosperity gospel. In an interesting take on the parentage of the theology see Robert M. Bowman, *The Word-Faith Controversy: Understanding the Health and Wealth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2001), 85-95. Bowman contends that there were four “fathers” of the Word-Faith movement, those being E.W. Kenyon, whom Bowman also confusingly labels as the “grandfather” of the theology, as well as the healing evangelists, William Branham, Oral Roberts and Hagin.

<sup>28</sup> Hagin termed his message as the “Word of Faith.” It is also known among its supporters as “positive confession” and the “faith message.” The independent churches that support this theology often term themselves as “Word” churches. To its detractors, the movement is usually labeled as the “prosperity gospel.” Some of the other less genteel epithets directed toward the movement include “the health and wealth gospel,” “name it and claim it” and “blab it and grab it.” For an account of some of these labels see, Allan Anderson, *An Introduction To Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 157.

Hagin was born and raised in McKinney, Texas, a small city northeast of Dallas. He weighed only two pounds at birth and was later diagnosed as having a deformed heart, a condition that caused him ill health throughout his childhood and teenage years.<sup>29</sup> In a father-absent home, Hagin was reared by his mother and grandmother who took him and his siblings to their local Southern Baptist church.<sup>30</sup> Hagin claimed a miraculous healing from his medical condition at the age of seventeen in August of 1934.<sup>31</sup> Following his healing, Hagin, without any theological training, became a Baptist evangelist for three years.<sup>32</sup> In 1937 he began attending the Full Gospel Tabernacle in McKinney, a Pentecostal church affiliated with the Assemblies of God. Hagin said he made the switch to Pentecostalism because he and the Pentecostals had similar beliefs about the healing power of prayer.<sup>33</sup> For the next twelve years Hagin served as an ordained Assemblies of God pastor in several small Texas towns, such as Tom Bean, Farmersville, Talco, Greggton and Van.<sup>34</sup> In 1949 Hagin joined the burgeoning ranks of healing evangelists that were sweeping the United States during the fifteen years that followed WWII.<sup>35</sup> Never a luminary in this competitive field, Hagin persevered with this phase of his ministry, but over time he transitioned to other avenues of evangelism. He initiated a radio ministry in 1966 that emphasized his evolving role as a “teacher” which had begun in 1960 with the publication of his first book, *Redeemed From Poverty, Sickness and*

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<sup>29</sup> Kenneth E. Hagin, *The Believer's Authority: Legacy Edition* (Broken Arrow, OK: Faith Library Publications, 2009), xiv.

<sup>30</sup> Hagin, *The Believer's Authority*, xv.

<sup>31</sup> Hagin, *The Believer's Authority*, xix.

<sup>32</sup> D.R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Henderson Publishers, Inc., 1995), 58.

<sup>33</sup> Hagin, *The Believer's Authority*, xix.

<sup>34</sup> Hagin, *The Believer's Authority*, xx.

<sup>35</sup> These evangelists included William Branham, Oral Roberts, A.A. Allen, Jack Coe, T.L. Osborne, Tommy Hicks and the Northern Albertan, Lorne Fox. They garnered fame from their healing campaigns and from the publicity generated by the *Voice of Healing* magazine published by Gordon Lindsay. See Allan Heaton Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 152 and McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 58.

*Death*.<sup>36</sup> He followed up these initiatives in 1968 with *The Word of Faith*, a monthly magazine that eventually grew to a circulation of over 200,000 copies.<sup>37</sup> By now his Word-Faith theology was gaining momentum and attracting followers. To capitalize on this situation, Hagin launched the Rhema Bible Training Centre in Tulsa in 1974.<sup>38</sup> The ministry continued to expand, compelling it in 1976 to move to a larger location in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, a suburb of Tulsa.<sup>39</sup> Here in 1985, Hagin opened the Rhema<sup>40</sup> Bible Church, which along with the Rhema Bible Training Centre developed into the *axis mundi* and pilgrimage centre for a global band of entrepreneurially-inclined protégés and their adepts.<sup>41</sup>

### **The Prosperity Gospel<sup>42</sup>**

Hagin's Word-Faith theology had two principal components. The first was divine healing, while the second was the concept that God desired to materially bless believers. It is this second aspect of Word-Faith theology that eventually developed into the prosperity gospel. From the 1960s on, the prosperity message became a central part of Hagin's Word-Faith ministry, but it was his protégée, Kenneth Copeland, who became the prosperity gospel specialist and who catapulted the theology to the forefront of Pentecostalism. In 1974 Copeland published *The Laws of Prosperity*, a book that has been reprinted many times since.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps more than any other publication, produced by

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<sup>36</sup> Hagin, *The Believer's Authority*, xxix.

<sup>37</sup> Hagin, *The Believer's Authority*, xxx.

<sup>38</sup> Hagin, *The Believer's Authority*, xxv.

<sup>39</sup> Hagin, *The Believer's Authority*, xxix.

<sup>40</sup> The word "rhema" is of Greek origin and means "an utterance by a living voice, a thing spoke or word." Within the Word of Faith movement "the term is used to refer to the direct revelation of God's intents, purposes, promises (and) power." See Milmon F. Harrison, *Righteous Riches: The Word of Faith Movement in Contemporary African American Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7.

<sup>41</sup> Coleman, "Conservative Protestantism and the World Order," 364.

<sup>42</sup> For an extensive review of the more noteworthy Bible verses prosperity gospel adherents use to support their theology, see Appendix A.

<sup>43</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*. (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1974).

the myriad of prosperity gospel preachers that have emerged around the world in the last four decades, this book captures the essence of the theology. Central to Copeland's explanation of the doctrine is his contention that while the promise of prosperity has been available from the early days of the Bible, God has deliberately kept "His system under wraps, hidden in the Word" and it can only be discerned if the believer is to dwell and meditate on scripture.<sup>44</sup>

This doctrine, sounding surprisingly Gnostic-like with its hidden nature, begins with God's covenant with Abraham. According to Harvey Cox, because of Christ's crucifixion, "the-health-and-wealth-gospel" proponents believe that they have "inherited the promises God made to Abraham, and these include both spiritual and material well being."<sup>45</sup> As Cox asserted, Copeland's book refers to several passages in Deuteronomy which apparently demonstrate that God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants is intensely material. Deuteronomy 29:9 is one of many verses that speak to the covenant while Deuteronomy 8:17-18 informs readers that it is God that gives his followers the power to get wealth.

Copeland and all prosperity gospel adherents around the world use Galatians 3:13-14 and Galatians 3:29 to prove that through Christ's crucifixion, Gentiles inherit the promises made to Abraham.<sup>46</sup> Although many promises were made to Abraham, prosperity is a key provision of this covenant, and according to Copeland, believers "need to realize that prosperity belongs to you now."<sup>47</sup> God has provided believers a contract and placed it in the Bible, where based on John 8:31-32, it frees believers from the

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<sup>44</sup>Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*, 57.

<sup>45</sup> Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, 272.

<sup>46</sup> Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*, 48.

<sup>47</sup> Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*.

authority of Satan.<sup>48</sup> There can be no doubt, for Copeland and others of the prosperity gospel lineage, that God wants his followers to prosper, and, they appeal to a host of scriptures from Ecclesiastes 11: 1, to Malachi 3:10, to the crystal-clear pronouncement of 3 John 2, to illustrate this point.

Where Copeland, Hagin and the prosperity gospel theologians break new ground is that they make such promises paramount and offer instructions on how believers are to access all of God's bounty. What previous generations of Christians have supposedly missed is the essential ingredient of calling into existence the desired outcome of the petitioner. Copeland refers to the last phrase of Mark 11:23 to make the point that if one is a believer "he shall have whatsoever he saith."<sup>49</sup> This verse leads to the development of the "Power of Confession" or the practice of "positive confession," which has become a hallmark of prosperity gospel practitioners.<sup>50</sup> According to Copeland, everyone has a "heavenly account" that can be primed by making deposits into this account through "tithing, giving to the poor, investing in the gospel and giving as a praise to God."<sup>51</sup> Once deposits such as these have been made into the believer's heavenly account they can be reclaimed through positive confession, which according to the promises of Mark 10:30 will provide a return of "an hundredfold now in this time."<sup>52</sup> A return of 100 percent on an investment is a spectacular result, but it can only happen if the investor/petitioner follows the six-step process Copeland outlines, including the most vital of all steps,

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<sup>48</sup> Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*, 47.

<sup>49</sup> Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*, 96.

<sup>50</sup> Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*, 96. Morris and Liroy, who have written a thorough critique of the prosperity gospel theology, from an opposing Christian perspective, also cite the significance of Romans 4:17 to prosperity gospel adherents. This verse gives believers the power of God "to call into being things that were not." See Russell A. Morris and Daniel T. Liroy, "A Historical and Theological Framework for Understanding Word of Faith Theology," *Conspectus* 13, (2012): 84.

<sup>51</sup> Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*, 74.

<sup>52</sup> Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*, 63.

utilizing a formulaic prayer. Fortunately Copeland provides an example of just such a prayer, which petitioners can modify to suit their individual circumstances.<sup>53</sup> The correct formulaic prayer, or “positive confession,” uttered with absolute faith that it will occur, will inevitably bring results, Copeland assures his readers. He states, “As you give cheerfully and generously, God will cause every blessing to come to you...This is the way God’s system works.”<sup>54</sup>

In summary, the prosperity gospel can be characterized as a mysterious process, which can, however, be discerned through studying the Bible and meditating on its promises. The essential element of the theology is that God has made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants that includes a provision for their material well being. Through the crucifixion of Christ, Gentiles also become de facto participants in this covenant. God wants the people covered under his covenant to prosper, but in order to access God’s bounty his followers must first joyously give to God in the manner prescribed above. After giving, which is essentially making deposits in one’s heavenly account, God will return to the depositors a return of 100 percent on their investment, if they positively confess or declare to God, exactly what they desire. This positive confession must be phrased in the correct formulaic manner and sincerely believed by the petitioner in order for it to succeed.

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<sup>53</sup> Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*, 101-103. To review Copeland’s formulaic prayer, see Appendix B.

<sup>54</sup> Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*, 106.

## The Early Leaders of the Prosperity Gospel



**Figure 1:** *At Campmeeting, from left: Oral Roberts, T.L. Osborn, Kenneth Copeland, Kenneth W. Hagin, Kenneth E. Hagin, and Richard Roberts.*

In Kenneth Hagin's book, *The Believer's Authority*, there is a most telling photo (figure 1), in that it portrays both the roots and the future path of the prosperity gospel.<sup>55</sup> The undated photo was taken at Hagin's *Campmeeting*, an annual revival meeting held on the campus of the Rhema Bible Training Centre. It shows six evangelists in a semi-circle, hands raised heavenward, in the Pentecostal style, eyes closed and obviously praying. From left to right the evangelists are Oral Roberts, T.L. Osborne, Kenneth Copeland, Kenneth W. Hagin, Kenneth E. Hagin and Richard Roberts. In the photo, Oral Roberts is seen holding a microphone for Copeland who was leading the group in prayer. Employing some amateur forensic sleuthing it is possible to deduce that the photo was taken after 1974, given the prominence accorded Copeland, who before this period was not a significant figure in the Pentecostal world.

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<sup>55</sup>Figure 1. "At Campmeeting," Hagin, *The Believer's Authority*, xxxvi.

The photo is revealing in that in the personages of Oral Roberts, T.L. Osborne and Kenneth Hagin, one sees classical Pentecostal preachers who, after World War II, emerged as part of the wave of healing evangelists who became a major influence in Pentecostalism for the next two decades.<sup>56</sup> Of the three, Oral Roberts was by far the most significant preacher at the time, because he had taken his ministry to the emerging medium of television, where he had become somewhat more accepted by the mainline denominations. Roberts had also become a notable figure in the nascent charismatic or second wave of Pentecostalism. His success was such that he had established a private university in 1963, named not surprisingly after himself. Osborne was also a prominent healing evangelist, who had garnered considerable acclaim during this period, much more so than Hagin, who was always a minor figure in the cadre of faith healers. By this time, however, Hagin had pivoted from being just a healing evangelist to being the proponent of Word-Faith theology. He had tapped the shoulder of his son, Kenneth W. Hagin, to be his successor and had named him as the head of the Rhema Bible Training Centre. Roberts had also selected his son Richard to succeed him as both the head of his ministry and his university. The younger Hagin and Roberts would, however, take dramatically different paths. Kenneth W. Hagin would successfully lead the Bible school and the Rhema Bible Church in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. Richard Roberts, would for a time, become the face of his father's television ministry and the President of Oral Roberts University. He was forced, however, to resign from that position in 2007 under a cloud of scandal that saw him and his wife accused of misusing university and ministry funds.

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<sup>56</sup> Anderson, *To The Ends of the Earth*, 152.



He followed up that embarrassment with a much-publicized DUI arrest in 2012.<sup>57</sup> Of the two non-filial relationships in the photo, Osborne gradually shifted the focus of his ministry to evangelizing in the developing world, while the much younger Copeland would forgo pastoring churches and instead embarked on a wildly successful television ministry that eventually saw him become the unofficial global leader of the prosperity gospel.

### **Controversy**

Given some of the outlandish claims of prosperity gospel ministers, it did not take long for controversy and notoriety to be heaped on the movement. Journalists, particularly from the popular Christian press, have written extensively about the phenomenon, but, as Milmon Harrison elaborates about mainstream academia, “scholars of religion have left it relatively untouched.”<sup>58</sup> Theologians from within the evangelical and Pentecostal communities, were however, quick to pounce on the prosperity gospel as soon as it began to flourish. The first to do so was Oral Roberts University professor Charles Farah, who in 1979 wrote *From the Pinnacle of the Temple*,<sup>59</sup> a book that was highly critical of the theology of the movement, particularly the “faith-formula” designed to call things into existence.<sup>60</sup> Another theologian, who in 1979 took the movement and particularly Ken and Gloria Copeland to task, was then Gordon-Conwell professor, Gordon Fee. Dr. Fee spoke of the movement as the “cult of prosperity” and asserted that it “flies full in the face of the whole New Testament. It is not Biblical in any

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<sup>57</sup> Stoycoff, Zack, “Richard Roberts, ORU’s former president, arrested on DUI complaint,” *Tulsa World*, January 31, 2012, <http://newsok.com/richard-roberts-former-oral-roberts-university-president-arrested-on-dui-complaint/article/3643253>.

<sup>58</sup> Milmon Harrison, *Righteous Riches*, viii.

<sup>59</sup> Charles Farah, *From the Pinnacle of the Temple* (Alachua, FL: Bridge-Logos, 1979).

<sup>60</sup> McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 77.

sense.”<sup>61</sup> This was followed in 1980 by an official statement from the General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God, the largest Caucasian and classical Pentecostal denomination in the United States.<sup>62</sup> Although moderate in tone, the statement clearly refuted the core tenets of the prosperity gospel and to the present time, this denomination has not changed its stance on the movement.

### **Authenticity**

The controversy surrounding the new theology took a different turn in 1988 when an adjunct professor at Oral Roberts University, D. R. McConnell, published a book, based on his M.A. thesis that was highly critical of the role of Kenneth Hagin in launching the movement. In *A Different Gospel*, McConnell makes the startling assertion that Hagin callously plagiarised the works of E. W. Kenyon to develop the Word-Faith theology, more than inferring that Hagin did not receive his instructions in the visits he claimed to have had from Jesus.<sup>63</sup> McConnell lines up eight works authored by Kenyon with eight publications written by Hagin.<sup>64</sup> In all cases the resemblances are strong. In many cases they are verbatim. That they are plagiarised is self-evident. It later came to light that not only had Hagin plagiarised the theological teachings of Kenyon, he did so again in 1967, this time with writings of John A. MacMillan, a Canadian missionary to China with the Christian and Missionary Alliance. This discovery was made by Dale Simmons, who was, at the time, a graduate student at Oral Roberts University. Simmons noted that at least 75 percent of *The Authority of the Believer*, a Hagin pamphlet

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<sup>61</sup> McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 78.

<sup>62</sup> McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 80.

<sup>63</sup> In his research on Hagin, McConnell has discovered that the prosperity pastor claims to have experienced eight separate visits from Jesus. See McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 59.

<sup>64</sup> McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 8-11.

published in 1967, was taken from a series of articles published by MacMillan in 1932.<sup>65</sup> This became one of Hagin's most popular publications and would eventually be reprinted over twenty times, including the 1984 edition cited extensively in this paper and renamed, *The Believer's Authority*. As to the authenticity of his writings, Hagin consistently denied that he plagiarised from either Kenyon or Macmillan. He countered that where the words were similar it was the same Holy Spirit that was inspiring him as had guided Kenyon and MacMillan decades earlier.<sup>66</sup> To McConnell, the most logical conclusion to be drawn is that both cases are examples of plagiarism.<sup>67</sup>

### **E.W. Kenyon**

To critics of the prosperity gospel who reside within evangelical or Pentecostal communities, E. W. Kenyon is a pivotal figure in the history of the movement. They see him as formulating the theology after he had become exposed to the influences of Unitarianism, New Thought and Christian Science. To proponents of the Word-Faith theology, Kenyon receives scant attention or recognition. This is because believers have faith in Hagin's claim that God had given him updated revelations about the Word-Faith doctrine.

Kenyon (1867-1948) was born and raised in upstate New York,<sup>68</sup> but moved to Boston in the early 1890s<sup>69</sup> where he enrolled in the Emerson School of Oratory in 1892.<sup>70</sup> As a teenager, he was raised as a Methodist, even preaching in his home church,<sup>71</sup> but by 1890 he had become a Baptist minister, a position he retained for the rest of his

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<sup>65</sup> McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 68.

<sup>66</sup> McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 69.

<sup>67</sup> McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 69.

<sup>68</sup> McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 30.

<sup>69</sup> Bowman, *The Word-Faith Controversy*, 36.

<sup>70</sup> John S. Haller Jr., *The History of New Thought: From Mind Cure to Positive Thinking and the Prosperity Gospel* (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation Press, 2012), 269.

<sup>71</sup> Hank Hanegraff, *Christianity In Crisis*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 17-18.

life. In 1900 he founded the Bethel Bible School in Spencer, MA, a school that had an enrollment of between 40 and 100 students during Kenyon's term as President, which lasted until 1923.<sup>72</sup> During this period Kenyon taught at the school, but the bulk of his time was spent as an evangelist touring churches in New England and the maritime provinces of Canada. In 1923 he moved to Southern California where he pastored churches until his 1931 move to Seattle where he founded a radio ministry and a publishing house. During his time on the west coast he associated with Pentecostals, even preaching at some of Aimee Semple McPherson's rallies, but he remained a Baptist.<sup>73</sup> Prominent Pentecostals, like faith healers Branham and Osborne, would quote Kenyon, but he remained a largely anonymous figure.<sup>74</sup> He did, however, garner attention posthumously, after it came to light, a quarter century after his death, that Hagin had extensively plagiarised his writing.

The theological critics of Word-Faith, led by McConnell, claimed that during his time in Boston, Kenyon had been unduly influenced by religious ideas that were not consistent with existing evangelical theology or Pentecostal doctrine as it would later develop. While in Boston, Kenyon regularly attended the church of Minot J. Savage, a leading Unitarian minister of the day.<sup>75</sup> At the Emerson School, he would have come under the influence of Charles Emerson, an educator whom McConnell terms a "collector of religions" whose personal faith "was a veritable smorgasbord of the sources underlying New Thought metaphysics: Platonism, Swedenborgianism, New England

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<sup>72</sup> McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 30-31.

<sup>73</sup> Bowman, *The Word-Faith Controversy*, 36.

<sup>74</sup> Bowman, *The Word-Faith Controversy*, 87-88.

<sup>75</sup> McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 33.

Unitarianism and Emersonian Transcendentalism.”<sup>76</sup> That Charles Emerson eventually ended up as a Christian Science minister<sup>77</sup> was further proof to Word-Faith critics that Kenyon was unduly influenced by “cultic” thoughts, even though he was never a member of a cult.<sup>78</sup> Throwing even more circumstantial evidence on the New Thought origins of Kenyon’s theology was the fact that a part-time lecturer and fellow student of his at the academy was Ralph Waldo Trine. In 1897, Trine published *In Tune with the Infinite*, which went on to sell more than one million copies, representing the largest sales of any book authored by a New Thought writer.<sup>79</sup>

McConnell, Hanegraff and a host of evangelical and Pentecostal critics of the prosperity gospel point to Kenyon’s time in Boston and his association with decidedly non-evangelical thinkers as having a lasting influence of his independent Baptist ministry and his subsequent publications. A seemingly equal number of academics with theological backgrounds dispute this claim. Bowman, a charismatic, who is not a Word-faith devotee, asserts that the assumption that Kenyon’s teachings had “some precedent in the mind-science cults” is “erroneous.”<sup>80</sup> Allan Anderson, who has over the last two decades supported the milder aspects of Word-Faith practice, contends that attempts to link the theology with the “New Thought of Phineas Quimby and the Christian Science of Mary Baker Eddy (are) arguments (which) remain unsubstantiated.”<sup>81</sup> In his just published book on Pentecostalism, he uses the same phrase, “remain unsubstantiated” to

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<sup>76</sup> McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 35.

<sup>77</sup> Haller Jr., *The History of New Thought*, 269.

<sup>78</sup> McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 50.

<sup>79</sup> McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 41.

<sup>80</sup> Bowman, *The Word-Faith Controversy*, 11.

<sup>81</sup> Allan Anderson, “Pentecostal Approaches To Faith And Healing,” *International Review of Mission* 91, no. 363 (2002): 530.

describe charges that the Word-Faith teaching originates with “Positive thinking, dualistic materialism, and nineteenth century New Thought.”<sup>82</sup>

Historian John S. Haller Jr., neither a theologian nor a combatant in the dispute, concludes that, “those who self-identify as being either part of the Word of Faith movement or New Thought object to comparisons between the two. Nevertheless, the day-to-day practices of the two movements belie their differences.”<sup>83</sup> Haller contends that, in actuality, the beliefs of the Word-of-Faith movement lie “somewhere between” Pentecostalism and New Thought.<sup>84</sup>

The debate between the critics and apologists of the Word-Faith theology about the origins of the movement matters little. What is far more relevant is the fact that the prosperity gospel has acquired significant popularity within some segments of the Pentecostal community in the United States and, as will be demonstrated, is having an even more pronounced impact on the Pentecostal and Christian community in the Global South.

### **Changing Personalities**

When the movement began, Kenneth Hagin was the acknowledged populariser of the Word-Faith theology, but there was never a move to develop a church denomination around the credo in the United States.<sup>85</sup> This reflects the strong independent nature of the group of ministers who shared the prosperity platform in the early days with Hagin. Most of these preachers had changed denominational affiliation during their ministerial careers

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<sup>82</sup> Allan Heaton Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth*, 219.

<sup>83</sup> Haller Jr., *The History of New Thought*, 271.

<sup>84</sup> Haller Jr., *The History of New Thought*, 269

<sup>85</sup> A Christian lay organization, the Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship International, (FGBMFI), which was closely associated with the charismatic or second wave of Pentecostalism, provided a major stage for proponents of the prosperity gospel, such as Hagin, to circulate their message. See Appendix C for additional information.

in order to minimize bureaucratic control and to maximize personal financial command of their entrepreneurial activities. In the main, this entrepreneurial activity was faith healing. Healing evangelists such as Oral Roberts and T.L. Osborne flirted with the Word-Faith movement, often appearing on the same stage as the senior and junior Hagin and Kenneth Copeland, but they always remained within the faith healing camp.<sup>86</sup> Other faith healers, however, such as John Osteen, made the transition to the Word-Faith movement where he joined early prosperity preachers such as Charles Capps and Frederick K.C. Price, the latter being one of the first graduates of Hagin's Rhema Bible school.<sup>87</sup>

The two major prosperity personalities who were part of the movement from its Kenneth Hagin-led inception to the present day are Hagin's son, Kenneth W. Hagin and Kenneth Copeland. They represent a thread of continuity from the past as the theology continues to evolve, but, more significantly, in their own ways, they are more responsible than any living individuals for the movement's expansion and popularity. Hagin Jr. has headed up the Rhema Bible Training Centre from its opening in 1974. This includes organizing the school and building its Word-Faith based curriculum<sup>88</sup> and over the ensuing four decades, establishing more than forty satellite campuses around the globe.<sup>89</sup>

As of 2011 more than 40,000 students have graduated from the Oklahoma campus along

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<sup>86</sup> While Roberts cannot be portrayed as a prosperity gospel purveyor, he nevertheless contributed some fund raising techniques that have become widely emulated and adapted by preachers around the globe. According to Simon Coleman, in 1954 Roberts introduced the concept of the "Blessing-Pact" which contended that a \$100 donation to his ministry would, within a year, return a similar sum to the donor, from some unexpected source. If it did not the Robert's ministry promised a refund to the donor. Two decades later Roberts introduced the idea of "seed faith" which postulated that a gift to his ministry would, in time, provide an expanded blessing to the donor. See Simon Coleman, "The charismatic gift," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 10, no. 2 (2004): 425.

<sup>87</sup> McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 4.

<sup>88</sup> Hagin, *The Believer's Authority*, xxv.

<sup>89</sup> Kenneth Hagin Ministries, March 3, 2013, [www.rbtc.org](http://www.rbtc.org).

with thousands more from the global campuses.<sup>90</sup> Hagin Jr. has adopted a far less flamboyant lifestyle than Copeland, and his emphasis on a teaching ministry, as represented by his Bible schools, has earned him less notoriety than the electronically-ubiquitous Copeland, who graces television screens on a nearly 24/7 basis around the world. Nonetheless, Hagin Jr. has powerfully impacted the growth of the prosperity gospel in the United States and across the globe through the theological teaching he provides to future preachers and parachurch leaders.

### **Copeland's Contribution**

Because he grew up immersed in his father's ministry, Hagin Jr. always seemed to know his place in the movement. Initially it was as the dutiful son, and on his father's passing, he was the obvious inheritor of the Tulsa enterprise. This was not the case for Copeland, who experienced several years of religious meandering before he found his true calling. Brought up as a Baptist, Copeland attended Oral Roberts University for a semester in 1967 and because he was a pilot, served for a time on Robert's flight crew.<sup>91</sup> It was, however, the audio tape of a Hagin sermon entitled "You Can Have What You Say" that changed the course of his ministerial calling because it was here that he first encountered the new theology.<sup>92</sup> He began preaching as a Word-Faith evangelist, with "no denominational ties or ministerial credentials" in 1968.<sup>93</sup> Quickly the prosperity teachings of the Word-Faith theology became his preaching niche and he soon became the acknowledged pacesetter of this message, publishing *The Laws of Prosperity*, in

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<sup>90</sup> Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth*, 220.

<sup>91</sup> Kurt Widmer, "I Have returned: Kenneth Copeland And The Word Of Faith Movement," *Journal of Religion and Culture* 7, (1993): 106.

<sup>92</sup>Widmer, "I Have returned." In *A Different Gospel*, McConnell quotes Kenneth Hagin Jr.'s recollection of ORU student Copeland being so destitute that he was given Kenneth Hagin's tapes. He was so desirous of the tapes that he was apparently willing to trade the title of his car for them. Hagin Jr. states that Copeland went on to memorize the tape and thus began his ministry. See McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 4.

<sup>93</sup> Widmer, "I Have returned," 107.



1974. For a decade he gained renown for his prosperity teachings, but by the early 1980s he had moderated his prosperity emphasis because of criticism from some of his closest evangelical colleagues who challenged his specialization and who chastised him for not teaching the gospel in its entirety.<sup>94</sup> After spending the first month of 1984 in prayer and fasting, Copeland claimed to have received a new revelation from God, compelling him to help other ministers preach the prosperity gospel. From this point on he stated he would donate 10 percent of the gross income from his ministry to help other preachers get the prosperity message out.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore he now saw himself, particularly after a visit to Africa, as a “prophet who teaches” and it was in this role as a facilitator and mentor to aspiring prosperity teachers that he jumped with gusto back into his ministry.<sup>96</sup> Since then he has not turned back. His ministry consists of his already mentioned ubiquitous television broadcasts, a robust publishing arm and a series of week-long conventions that are held around the country in major auditoriums. In a perceptive article on one such convention, held in August of 2009, Jonathan L. Walton, showed how his current “Big Five of the Word of Faith,” Jerry Savelle, Jesse Duplantis, Creflo Dollar and Gloria and Kenneth Copeland, taught devotees to deal with the 2008 financial crash, the most significant economic downturn in the United States since the Great Depression.<sup>97</sup> (For another conference featuring Copeland, see figure 2.)<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Widmer, “I Have returned,” 108.

<sup>95</sup> Widmer, “I Have returned,” 108-9.

<sup>96</sup> Widmer, “I Have returned,” 109.

<sup>97</sup> Apparently, to prosperity gospel preachers, it does not matter if times are good or times are bad, the best way to handle any situation is to “sow a seed,” according to evangelist Jerry Savelle who spoke at this convention. See Jonathan L. Walton, “Stop Worrying and Start Sowing! A Phenomenological Account of the Ethics of Divine Investment” in *Pentecostalism and Prosperity*, eds. Katherine Attanasi and Amos Yong (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 107-8.

<sup>98</sup> Figure 2, is an electronic promotional flyer featuring the speaker lineup at a prosperity gospel conference held in Forest Park, a Chicago suburb. This conference was organized by prosperity preacher Bill Winston. Four of the speakers hail from the US with Kenneth Copeland being the main drawing card. Reflecting the international nature of the prosperity gospel are Bishops Tudor Bismark and David Oyedepo. Bismark,

Copeland’s influence is not felt just domestically. For example, according to Vinson Synan, Regent University emeritus professor of theology, Hagin Sr. and Copeland taught the prosperity gospel in a series of “teaching missions” on a trip to Nigeria in the early 1990s and as a result, “churches exploded after that into millions of members” across the southern part of the country.<sup>99</sup> Anderson claims that Kenneth Hagin was a “moderate” with regard to preaching the prosperity gospel, but that Copeland and others seem to focus more on their lavish lifestyles.<sup>100</sup> He substantiates this claim by pointing to the Copeland’s 18,000 square foot home, the nine airplanes owned by their ministry and their links “to an array of for-profit companies involved in livestock, aviation, real estate development and gas and oil wells.”<sup>101</sup>



**Figure 2: “Faith Explodes in Bill Winston’s Faith Conference.” Speakers for the 2011 International Faith Conference, Forest Park, IL.**

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who is originally from Zimbabwe, is now headquartered in London. Oyedepo leads a far-flung international denomination from his home in Lagos, Nigeria. “Faith Explodes in Bill Winston’s Faith Conference,” photograph, <http://themallofffaith.wordpress.com/tag/david-oyedepo/> (accessed February 3, 2014).

<sup>99</sup> Isaac Phiri and Joe Maxwell, “Gospel Riches,” *Christianity Today* 51, no. 7 (2007): 26.

<sup>100</sup> Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth*, 221.

<sup>101</sup> Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth*, 221-222.

## Moving to the Centre

A reflection of how entrenched the prosperity gospel has become in the United States is the fact that many of its basic tenets have been adopted by some mainstream churches. Harrison speaks of denominational churches “appropriating” Word of Faith “teachings and practices.”<sup>102</sup> Kirbyjon Caldwell, the pastor of the largest Methodist congregation in the country, Windsor Village church in Houston, is an exemplar of this trend. Caldwell, who gave the benediction at both Inaugurals of George W. Bush, “can sound as Prosperity as the next Pastor” in making frequent references to the “abundant life” and stating that “it is unscriptural not to own land.”<sup>103</sup> Harrison points out that popular culture also reflects the “wider currency” of the movement, citing how talk show hosts like Oprah Winfrey and “Dr. Phil” McGraw frequently use the prosperity gospel phrase “name it and claim it” to people who are desirous of making changes in their personal lives.<sup>104</sup> Religious movements are never static and as has been illustrated by the above examples, the prosperity gospel is moving ever closer to the centre of American culture, which is itself, extremely dynamic. A younger generation of superstar pastors are driving this change and are offering what *Time* magazine characterizes as “Prosperity Lite,” the watered down, more inclusive version of Word of Faith teachings.<sup>105</sup> The new star of the movement and the epitome of “Prosperity Lite” is Joel Osteen.

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<sup>102</sup> Harrison, *Righteous Riches*, 160.

<sup>103</sup> David Van Biema and Jeff Chu, “Does God Want You To Be Rich?” *Time*, 168, no. 12 (2006): 5.

<sup>104</sup> Harrison, *Righteous Riches*, 161.

<sup>105</sup> Van Biema and Chu, *Time*, 2.

## Joel Osteen

Hailed as “America’s Pastor” in a CBS television interview, Joel Osteen heads up Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas.<sup>106</sup> With over 40,000 attendees at weekend services, Lakewood has for a decade been one of the largest, if not the largest, church in the United States.<sup>107</sup> Osteen’s weekly television services can be accessed by virtually every home in the United States and are shown in a hundred countries around the globe.<sup>108</sup> A best-selling author, his 2004 book, *Your Best Life Now*, sold over five million copies and he received a \$13 million dollar advance for his 2007 book, *Become a Better You*.<sup>109</sup> His current book, *I Declare: 31 Promises to Speak Over Your Life*, is another best-selling success for a minister who shuns the “fire and brimstone” approach of evangelical and classical Pentecostal preachers. In an interview with *Texas Monthly*, Osteen contrasted his approach to preaching with that of his friend Billy Graham. Citing Graham’s sermons against sin with a message of “Don’t do this,” Osteen explained that for Graham, “that is what he was called to do.”<sup>110</sup> He went on to explain that “I’m preaching about God being good, he’s for you...I see more people respond to that than being beaten down and told, “Don’t do this, don’t do this, don’t do this.”<sup>111</sup>

Christine Miller and Nathan Carlin contend that in recent years Osteen’s Lakewood Church “has attempted to conceal its connection to controversial Word of

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<sup>106</sup> Gregory K. Hollifield, “Does God Want You to Be Rich? A Practical Theologian’s Response to the Gospel of Prosperity,” *Journal of Ministry & Theology* 15, no. 2, (2011): 27.

<sup>107</sup> See the online article on the ten largest churches in America, taken from Outreach Magazine which compiles an annual list. Osteen has maintained the top spot since he moved his church to the Compaq Centre in downtown Houston. “10 Largest Churches in America,” *ChristCultureNews*, November 5, 2012, [www.christculturenews.com/10-largest-churches-in-america/#](http://www.christculturenews.com/10-largest-churches-in-america/#).

<sup>108</sup> Christine Miller and Nathan Carlin, “Joel Osteen as Cultural Selfobject: Meeting the Needs of the Group Self and Its Individual Members in and from the Largest Church in America,” *Pastoral Psychology* 59, no. 1 (2010): 28.

<sup>109</sup> Miller and Carlin, “Joel Osteen as Cultural Selfobject,” 28.

<sup>110</sup> Evan Smith, “Joel Osteen,” *Texas Monthly* 35, no. 11 (2007): 3.

<sup>111</sup> Smith, “Joel Osteen,” 3.

Faith teaching in order to enter the Protestant mainstream.”<sup>112</sup> They cite the rewriting of the Lakewood “Bible Pledge” originally penned under the guidance of John Osteen, Joel’s father, which referenced positive confession, one of the hallmarks of Word of Faith theology. They conclude that while “still heavily dependent on Word of Faith teaching,” Joel Osteen “has rendered the controversial elements more palatable to reach a wider audience.”<sup>113</sup> It is quite likely that most of Osteen’s TV audience or those that read his books do not know that he took over his father John’s ministry, nor that the elder Osteen was attracted to the Word-Faith movement by Kenneth Hagin, a man he referred to as “chosen of God.”<sup>114</sup>

Joel Osteen was, however, a reluctant entrant into the Pentecostal ministry. He studied for one semester at Oral Roberts University in 1982, before dropping out and returning to work in his father’s church where he rose through the ranks to eventually become the producer of the Lakewood television ministry.<sup>115</sup> He went on to take control of all of Lakewood’s marketing, including the purchasing of Houston’s channel 55 television station, a move which saw him installed as station president. Osteen never preached a sermon until the age of thirty-five, when his hospitalized father pleaded with him to take the next sermon. Joel Osteen preached that sermon at Lakewood and six days later his father passed away.<sup>116</sup> At the time of the senior Osteen’s death Lakewood attracted six thousand members to weekend services. Since taking over his father’s ministry in 1999, the rise of Lakewood and the star of Joel Osteen in particular have been meteoric. The church building became increasingly cramped with thousands of new

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<sup>112</sup> Miller and Carlin, “Joel Osteen as Cultural Selfobject,” 33.

<sup>113</sup> Miller and Carlin, “Joel Osteen as Cultural Selfobject,” 33.

<sup>114</sup> McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 4.

<sup>115</sup> Miller and Carlin, “Joel Osteen as Cultural Selfobject,” 28.

<sup>116</sup> Patrick Rogers and Vickie Bane, “Joel Osteen Counts His Blessings,” *People* 68, no. 25 (2007): 94-100.

members, forcing its eventual move from the suburbs to downtown Houston. There in 2005, the Osteen ministry took over the Compaq Centre, signing a sixty-year lease that included a rental arrangement of \$12 million for the first thirty years.<sup>117</sup> The new auditorium is the former home of the Houston Rockets of National Basketball Association and it provides the Lakewood church with a venue that is unparalleled in US church circles. With its free parking and nine thousand covered parking spots, the church was immediately able to attract ten thousand more people each weekend.

Osteen attributes his success to the positive message that he dispenses.

There are a lot of negative things happening in the world and in people's lives. What we share is hopeful, and I think it resonates. I don't know why we've taken off, but maybe it's because I'm younger, because I'm from a new generation.<sup>118</sup>

In a review of one of Osteen's 2011 books, Graham Christian commented that Osteen "exemplifies an American kind of gospel—no longer of prosperity, but of kindness."<sup>119</sup> This assessment probably goes too far, because Osteen's most recent publication, *I Declare: 31 Promises to Speak Over Your Life*, as its title implies, is vintage positive confession language from the early days of the Word of Faith movement. Nevertheless Osteen was probably being truthful in the above quote, because being so close to the situation, and given the first fifteen years of his adult life which he spent in relative anonymity, it might be hard for him to discern the reasons for his fame, popularity and wealth, other than to attribute it to the hand of God. In the last decade, however, an all too small group of scholars have begun to formulate some explanations for the strength of

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<sup>117</sup> Smith, "Joel Osteen," 2.

<sup>118</sup> Smith, "Joel Osteen," 1.

<sup>119</sup> Graham Christian, "A review of 'Becoming a Man of Unwavering Faith,' by Joel Osteen," *Library Journal* 136, no. 12 (2011): 68.

prosperity gospel and for the fame and following that the movement's leaders in the United States, such as Osteen, Copeland, Creflo Dollar and T. D. Jakes, have succeeded in attracting. An even smaller group of academics have been examining this subject in the Global South.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ASIA

#### KOREA

##### The Religious Landscape

Near the end of the Choson dynasty, which ruled Korea for five centuries from 1392 to 1910, Protestant missionaries from the United States were encouraged by the palace elite to set up schools and hospitals in the isolated “Hermit Kingdom.”<sup>120</sup> A century previously, when Catholicism was introduced to Korea from China, the same Choson dynasty severely persecuted those caught practicing the western faith.<sup>121</sup> What had changed in the interim is that the Choson rulers had come to see their nearby Asian neighbours, China, Russia and in particular, rapidly industrializing Japan, as imperial threats. Therefore they courted strong western nations, such as the United States, to take an expanded role in their country and offset the influence of their regional adversaries.<sup>122</sup> Beginning in the mid-1880s, American missionaries led by the Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists, set up schools, health clinics, and hospitals. In doing so, these Protestants found ready acceptance from the local population. The reason for their rapid success in converting Koreans, according to Andrew Kim, is that they encountered a “religious void.”<sup>123</sup> Buddhism, which had entered the country fifteen hundred years earlier, had long been suppressed by the Confucian-influenced Choson dynasty, who had seen it as a

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<sup>120</sup> Andrew Eungi Kim, “Political Insecurity, Social Chaos, Religious Void and the Rise of Protestantism in Late Nineteenth-Century Korea,” *Social History* 26, no. 3 (2001): 271.

<sup>121</sup> Kim, “Political Insecurity, Social Chaos, Religious Void and the Rise of Protestantism in Late Nineteenth-Century Korea,” 271.

<sup>122</sup> Kim, “Political Insecurity, Social Chaos, Religious Void and the Rise of Protestantism in Late Nineteenth-Century Korea,” 272.

<sup>123</sup> Kim, “Political Insecurity, Social Chaos, Religious Void and the Rise of Protestantism in Late Nineteenth-Century Korea,” 273.



corrupt institution. The most wide-spread belief system among the majority of the population was shamanism, and though pervasive, it lacked any institutional power to challenge the Protestant missionaries. None-the-less, shamanism remains “the enduring core of Korean religious thought,” and as Kim points out, every imported religion, from Buddhism, to Confucianism to Christianity, has “had to compromise with and absorb elements of Shamanism in order to be accepted by the Korean people.”<sup>124</sup>

After Japan annexed Korea in 1910, the western churches became a significant reservoir for channelling pent up collective sentiments for nationhood which further heightened their appeal.<sup>125</sup> Unfortunately for Korea, after the Japanese were defeated in WWII, it was but a scant half-decade before the nation found itself in a calamitous civil war, which not only split the nation, but cost hundreds of thousands in lost lives through disease, famine, and the ravages of war. It was during the Korean War that classical Pentecostalism, in the form of the Assemblies of God, arrived in Korea. As part of its evangelizing efforts the church set up a Bible School. One of its first students was David Yonggi Cho who would go on to become the most important Asian voice of Pentecostalism and a theological innovator whose impact was felt throughout Christianity.

### **David Yonggi Cho (1936—)**

Cho came of age in a Korea that was enduring the last decade of the Japanese Imperial Period and the first decade of a civil war that resulted in the partition of the country. He grew up as the eldest son in a Buddhist family of nine children and led a

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<sup>124</sup> Andrew Eungi Kim, “Christianity, Shamanism, and Modernization in South Korea,” *Cross Currents* 50, no. ½, (2000): 112.

<sup>125</sup> Kim, “Political Insecurity, Social Chaos, Religious Void and the Rise of Protestantism in Late Nineteenth-Century Korea,” 278.

relatively normal life until his seventeenth year when he contracted tuberculosis.<sup>126</sup> Given three months to live by his doctor, Cho was resigned to death until he was approached by a Christian high school girl. She not only spoke to him about Jesus and his love for humanity, but she also prayed for Cho's health to improve.<sup>127</sup> Cho says that over time he began to believe that Jesus would heal him and miraculously, six months after his diagnosis, his health took a turn for the better, allowing him to finish high school.<sup>128</sup> He left his rural hometown in 1956 to enroll in the Full Gospel Seminary, an Assemblies of God Bible School in Seoul. Here he became student body president and distinguished himself as an English translator for American missionaries and visiting evangelists.<sup>129</sup>

Upon graduation Cho decided to become an evangelist, a job that offered no pay and no church to call his own. This was a daunting career choice in war-torn and poverty-stricken South Korea. His initial service as an evangelist was held on May 18, 1958, in what became the first of three iconic edifices associated with his ministry. Inauspiciously, Cho began his career in an abandoned U.S. military tent, using discarded apple crates as a pulpit.<sup>130</sup> Although many residents of Daejo-dong, a farming village on the outskirts of Seoul, were invited to the meeting, the only people who showed up were Cho, Lay Minister Jasil Choi, and her three children.<sup>131</sup> Lay Minister Choi was a middle-aged nurse who went through Bible School the same time as Cho.<sup>132</sup> She felt compelled to join Cho in his ministry, and until her death, some decades later, she became his closest associate and advisor. (If Cho was a modern day apostle Paul, then Choi was his

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<sup>126</sup>David Yonggi Cho, *David Yonggi Cho: Ministering Hope for 50 Years* (Alachua, FL: Bridge-Logos, 2008), 2.

<sup>127</sup> Cho, *David Yonggi Cho*, 4-9.

<sup>128</sup> Cho, *David Yonggi Cho*, 10.

<sup>129</sup> Cho, *David Yonggi Cho*, 11.

<sup>130</sup> Cho, *David Yonggi Cho*, 17.

<sup>131</sup> Cho would eventually marry a daughter of Jasil Choi. See Cho, *David Yonggi Cho*, 96.

<sup>132</sup> Cho, *David Yonggi Cho*, 11.

colleague, Timothy.) By dint of diligent proselytizing, the Pentecostal duo went throughout the village speaking about the gospel of Jesus. They were paid scant attention until one of their prayers apparently led to the healing of a woman who had been paralyzed for seven years.<sup>133</sup> Their fame spread rapidly and brought them into conflict with local female shamans, who saw the duo as a threat to their monopoly of the village exorcism marketplace. Over a three-year period more “miracles” followed, attracting curious villagers who converted along with some shamans.<sup>134</sup> Now operating from a much larger tent, Cho moved to the nearby neighbourhood of Seodaemun where he led a congregation of six hundred believers. In February of 1962 his flock moved into the Seodae Gate Revival Centre, a building that could seat fifteen hundred people.<sup>135</sup> Still an evangelist, Cho was ordained in the Korean Assemblies of God in April of 1962, and two months later the congregation decided to change its name to the Central Full Gospel Church, the second of Cho’s iconic spiritual homes.<sup>136</sup>

It was at the Central Full Gospel Church that Cho began to clearly distinguish himself from his Pentecostal pastoral peers, not only in Korea, but around the globe. Always an indefatigable worker, Cho was an ambitious pastor who led by example when it came to saving souls. He spent nearly all of his waking hours in church activities, suffering, as he says, from “constant fatigue.”<sup>137</sup> Largely through his own diligence and charisma he was able to build his church to twenty-four hundred members by 1964, which was still short of his personal goal of three thousand parishioners.<sup>138</sup> His frenetic schedule eventually caught up with him and he collapsed on stage while interpreting for a

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<sup>133</sup> Cho, *David Yonggi Cho*, 36.

<sup>134</sup> Cho, *David Yonggi Cho*, 21.

<sup>135</sup> Cho, *David Yonggi Cho*, 71.

<sup>136</sup> Cho, *David Yonggi Cho*, 71.

<sup>137</sup> David Yonggi Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups* (Alachua, FL: Bridge-Logos, 1981), 4.

<sup>138</sup> Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups*, 4.

visiting American evangelist. He was forced to spend most of the next year in bed, recuperating from what his doctor described as a psychologically induced illness caused by years of overworking.<sup>139</sup> The twenty-eight-year-old Cho was at a crossroads in his ministry as his medical advisers suggested that he leave his calling to find a vocation less physically and emotionally demanding. It was during this period of convalescence that, much like Hagin decades earlier, Cho claims that God began to speak to him. He was told by God that he would be healed, but that it would take ten years to accomplish. This, Cho determined, was God's punishment meted out to him for his personal pride and arrogance about his meteoric rise as a minister and church builder.<sup>140</sup>

Despite his physical limitations, Cho continued to direct the affairs of his church, largely from his bed, all the while never relinquishing his goal to build the largest church in Korea. He felt that God was directing him, through this period of convalescence and forced reflection, to revise his techniques of church building. Searching the scriptures he was inspired by the meetings of the early Christian Church in the houses of believers. He was also drawn to the technique that Moses learned from his father-in-law, Jethro, whereby Moses delegated his authority to trustworthy men who could help him adjudicate disputes that arose among the children of Israel.<sup>141</sup> Amalgamating these concepts, Cho devised a plan that would see him delegate his pastoral authority to his deacons, who in turn would open up their homes as house churches where they would preach the gospel, pray for the sick, and evangelize their neighbours.<sup>142</sup> Enthused by this concept, he presented the plan to the deacons who soundly rejected his vision.

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<sup>139</sup> Cho, *Dr. David Yonggi Cho*, 87.

<sup>140</sup> Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups*, 11.

<sup>141</sup> Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups*, 17-18.

<sup>142</sup> Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups*, 19.

After he prayed about this defeat with Jasil Choi, she suggested that Cho present his plan to the deaconesses of the church. The deaconesses were as accepting of the plan as the deacons were against it. Under the direction of Choi, Seoul was divided into twenty districts which squared with the number of women who had agreed to lead home church meetings.<sup>143</sup> After some initial organizational, training and logistical issues were resolved, the women's home-church cell groups began to succeed. This amazed almost everyone, most specifically the men of the church, and those familiar with the patriarchal structure of Korean society. Initially Cho would meet with the cell group leaders every Wednesday and teach them what they were to minister about in the following week.<sup>144</sup> The cell groups were to ideally contain from ten to twelve families, and once a group reached fifteen families it had to divide. The cell groups quickly multiplied, and once they had reached 150, Cho hired some assistant ministers to direct them.<sup>145</sup> As for the cell meetings themselves, they were to be a one-hour meeting that featured singing, prayer, and a sermon. The cells consisted primarily of neighbourhood women and some of their children. In addition to services, cell leaders were expected to visit about four households in their cell each week.<sup>146</sup> As well, cell members were expected to visit those who were sick in the group or who had experienced a death in their family, and during such occasions help them with household duties.<sup>147</sup> With regard to evangelistic methods Cho instructed his cell members to look for people who were experiencing "troubles," be they marital, financial, or health related.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups*, 29.

<sup>144</sup> Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups*, 34.

<sup>145</sup> Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups*, 39.

<sup>146</sup> Joel Comiskey, "Rev. Cho's Cell Groups and Dynamics of Church Growth," in *Charis and Charisma*, eds. Sung-Hoon Myung and Young-Gi Hong (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 153.

<sup>147</sup> Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups*, 51.

<sup>148</sup> Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups*, 57.

In the Confucian-influenced culture of Korea, women had never been ceded such positions of leadership as those acquired by cell group leaders. Cho insisted, however, that all cell group leaders, including his associate leader Jasil Choi, wear hats when they led their cells or made cell home visits. This was to demonstrate that while exhibiting a leadership role, cell leaders were still under the authority of Cho, just as women in the early church had been directed by the Apostle Paul to cover their heads if they were prophesying in a church service.<sup>149</sup> Cho's patriarchal attitude toward the women in his church was typical of most Pentecostal leaders of the time. None-the-less he provided a space for the increased participation of women which was enthusiastically filled.

The success of the cell groups can be seen in the phenomenal growth of Cho's church after their inauguration. Within five years of their formation, ten thousand worshippers were attending the Seodaemun church every Sunday in four separate services.<sup>150</sup> It was during this period that Cho says God spoke to him and told him to "Build a church that can house 10,000 at one time for a service."<sup>151</sup> As a result of this prompting, Cho broke ground in 1969 for a new church on the island of Yoido in the middle of the Han River, which flows through Seoul. (See figure 3.)<sup>152</sup> Completed in 1974 and initially named the Central Full Gospel Church, Cho was able to cram eighteen thousand worshippers into the first service. By 1979 the congregation had swelled to one hundred thousand people, a number that in turn doubled by 1981. The church name was changed to the Yoido Full Gospel Church in 1984, by which time the church had four hundred thousand registered members. A decade later the church topped the seven

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<sup>149</sup> Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups*, 29.

<sup>150</sup> Cho, *Dr. David Yonggi Cho*, 107.

<sup>151</sup> Cho, *Dr. David Yonggi Cho*, 107.

<sup>152</sup> Figure 3. "The Yoido Full Gospel Church, Seoul, Korea," photograph, <http://thethreewisemonkeys.com/2012/12/21/belief-in-korea-the-yoido-full-gospel-church/>, (accessed February 3, 2014).

hundred thousand member mark, complete with seven hundred pastors, all under the direction of Cho.<sup>153</sup> Clearly it had become the largest church in the world, a fact recognized by the Guinness Book of World Records in 2005.<sup>154</sup> More significantly for the Pentecostal movement, Cho's cell group concept was widely emulated, particularly its emphasis on the use of female worshippers as lay leaders.



Figure 3: *The Yoido Full Gospel Church, Seoul, Korea.*

### Cho's Theology

There can be no doubt about Cho's ability to build a church. The numbers speak for themselves. But what was he saying, and how was he preaching that would engender such a mass following? On the surface Cho was, and is, a classical Pentecostal, steeped in the teachings of the Assemblies of God, the denomination most associated with

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<sup>153</sup> Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth*, 224. By this time there were 28,000 cell groups in the church that were headed by women. In addition there were also a much smaller number of men's cell groups that met on Saturday evenings and cell groups that met at the workplace. See Comiskey, *Rev. Cho's Cell Groups and Dynamics of Church Growth*, 145.

<sup>154</sup> Cho, *Dr. David Yonggi Cho*, 126.

Pentecostalism across the globe. His sermons, according to one of his associate Pastors, are built around the “fivefold gospel” and the “threefold blessing.”<sup>155</sup> Four of the items that comprise the fivefold gospel are staples of Pentecostal theology wherever it is found. They are: belief in salvation, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, divine healing, and the imminent return of Jesus. To this quartet of theological underpinnings Cho has added “the gospel of blessing,” which he developed into the threefold blessing. The threefold blessing is based on 3 John 2, a favorite verse of prosperity preachers throughout the world. The King James Version of this scripture reads as, “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.” One Korean scholar and theologian affirms that Cho “always stresses the blessings of the soul, material prosperity, and health. Material blessing is central in his ministry...He believes that a good God will give good things to His children.”<sup>156</sup>

In his *Unleashing the Power of Faith*, an excellent representation of the more practical aspects of Cho’s theology is demonstrated.<sup>157</sup> The reader learns that one “must fill yourself with thoughts of great wealth,”<sup>158</sup> and “if you desire to live a successful life of wealth, you must always have a picture of yourself as a wealthy person.”<sup>159</sup> A person’s life, Christian or otherwise, “is governed by what you say,”<sup>160</sup> and “we must declare continuously”<sup>161</sup> if success is desired. As might be expected from a prosperity

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<sup>155</sup> Young-hoon Lee, “The Life and Ministry of David Yonggi Cho and the Yoido Full Gospel Church,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 7, no. 1(2004): 11.

<sup>156</sup> Myung Soo Park, “Korean Pentecostal Spirituality as Manifested in the Testimonies of Believers of the Yoido Full Gospel Church,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 7, no. 1 (2004): 50.

<sup>157</sup> David Yonggi Cho, *Unleashing the Power of Faith* (Alchua FL: Bridge-Logos), 2006).

<sup>158</sup> Cho, *Unleashing the Power of Faith*, 114.

<sup>159</sup> Cho, *Unleashing the Power of Faith*, 115.

<sup>160</sup> Cho, *Unleashing the Power of Faith*, 18.

<sup>161</sup> Cho, *Unleashing the Power of Faith*, 71.



preacher, “the principle of sowing and reaping”<sup>162</sup> is in effect, as is “the principle of giving and receiving.”<sup>163</sup> Cho concludes that “concerning your business and your health, at all times you must have the mind of wealth. When you do so, God will add to your wealth and make your life abundant.”<sup>164</sup>

### **An International Star**

The more his church grew, the more prominent Cho became throughout the Pentecostal world. One aspect of his global outreach was the establishment, in 1976, of Church Growth International, an international mission centre which was located adjacent to the Yoido Church.<sup>165</sup> By 2003 this led to Yoido sending over six hundred missionaries abroad to dozens of Global South countries and to the establishment of seminaries in countries as diverse as Indonesia, Kenya, Uzbekistan, Bolivia, China, and Japan.<sup>166</sup> Another aspect of his growing international stature were the increasing requests for him to minister overseas. He spent six months abroad in 1973, speaking primarily to churches and conferences in Europe, delivering his threefold blessing message to believers, as well as his church building strategies to would-be emulators among the ranks of aspiring clergy.<sup>167</sup> The six-months-abroad pattern would be one he would continue for much of his ministry, particularly from the late 1970s forward in the United States, where he became a regular in charismatic speaking circles.<sup>168</sup> Because of his affiliation with the

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<sup>162</sup> Cho, *Unleashing the Power of Faith*, 59.

<sup>163</sup> Cho, *Unleashing the Power of Faith*, 77.

<sup>164</sup> Cho, *Unleashing the Power of Faith*, 116.

<sup>165</sup> Cho, *Dr. David Yonggi Cho*, 137.

<sup>166</sup> Lee, *The Life and Ministry of David Yonggi Cho and the Yoido Full Gospel Church*, 10. Regarding his missionary thrust, Cho proudly asserts that he never received financial aid from any foreign missionary and has in fact donated many thousands of dollars for missionary work overseas. He also quite unashamedly states that he sees his “missionaries as a source of wealth, because they will be bringing money in.” See Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups*, 170-171.

<sup>167</sup> Cho, *Dr. David Yonggi Cho*, 135.

<sup>168</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 231.

Assemblies of God, Cho was highly regarded by classical Pentecostals. To their chagrin, however, he had no difficulty affiliating with second wave charismatics, such as Oral Roberts and Demos Shakarian, and third wave neo-Pentecostals, like Kenneth Hagin and Robert Tilton. His ecumenism even allowed him to embrace such figures as Robert Schuller, who preached at the Yoido church, and to praise such New Thought writers such as Norman Vincent Peale and Napoleon Hill.<sup>169</sup> By affirming elements within a large swath of Christianity, and by garnering acclaim for growing the world's largest church, Cho inevitably created tension and jealousy among Pentecostals and evangelicals, causing him to receive criticism on two fronts; his use of the prosperity gospel and his propensity to syncretise elements of Korean indigenous religion into his brand of Pentecostalism.

### **The Prosperity Challenge**

The rapid growth of his church made Cho a celebrity within Pentecostals circles in the early 1970s, but it did not take long for classical Pentecostals in the United States, particularly his own denomination, to notice that while Cho preached about salvation and healing, he also emphasized prosperity. Considering that the Assemblies of God had published church circulars warning their followers about the dangers of this line of theology, Cho's prosperity message was a problem. Evangelical and Pentecostal critics in the United States voiced their concerns about Cho's prosperity teaching, just as they had about Hagin and Copeland. It was in his own country, however, where Cho faced his greatest theological challenge. Writing guardedly, Cho suggests that a fellow minister published a book in which a "bitter attack" was launched on "the idea of the threefold

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<sup>169</sup> Allan Anderson, "The Contribution of David Yonggi Cho to a Contextual Theology in Korea, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 12, no. 1(2003): 102, n. 202.

blessing.”<sup>170</sup> Allan Park is more direct, stating that it was the Presbyterian Church of Korea, the denomination which brought Christianity to the country and is still Korea’s largest Christian communion, which made the threefold blessing a “problematic issue,” because they were envious of Cho’s “sudden success in his ministry.”<sup>171</sup> Criticism also came from within the ranks of the Korean Assemblies of God, which tried to expel Cho. This initiative was checked by Cho loyalists, but the criticism never abated, causing Cho to withdraw his church from the denomination for a decade starting in 1981.<sup>172</sup> Though he returned to the Korean Assemblies of God in 1991, Cho and his ministry continued to be assailed by many classical Pentecostals and mainline Christians for propagating the prosperity gospel. What changed, however, was that within the classical Pentecostal academic community, a group of Cho apologists, led by Allan Anderson and those associated with him at the University of Birmingham, began a campaign to defend him. Anderson developed a line of reasoning that portrayed the threefold blessing as part of a “contextual Pentecostal theology” which Cho developed as a result of his “Korean context of poverty, Japanese occupation, and the Korean war; and should not be interpreted within the context of western wealth and materialism as might be done with the prosperity theology of Kenneth Copeland, for example.”<sup>173</sup> Wonsuk Ma preferred to label Cho’s message as the “theology of blessing” rather than the prosperity gospel,<sup>174</sup> even though he admitted that the threefold blessing was self-centred, and as such not

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<sup>170</sup> David Yonggi Cho, “Church Growth and the Sermon,” in *Charis and Charisma: David Yonggi Cho and the Growth of the Yoido Full Gospel Church*, eds. Sung-Hoon Myung and Young-Gi Hong (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 76.

<sup>171</sup> Allan Myung Soo Park, “David Yonggi Cho and International Pentecostal/Charismatic Movements,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 12, no. 1 (2003): 120.

<sup>172</sup> Park, “David Yonggi Cho and International Pentecostal/Charismatic Movements,” 120-21.

<sup>173</sup> Allan Anderson, “The Contextual Theology of David Yonggi Cho,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 7, no. 1 (2004): 116.

<sup>174</sup> Wonsuk Ma, “David Yonggi Cho’s Theology of Blessing: Basis, Legitimacy, and Limitations,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 35, no. 2 (2011): 141.

necessarily a traditional teaching of Christianity.<sup>175</sup> In another article, Ma conceded that there was no difference between the prosperity gospel of the Americas and “what is preached in Asia. The West preaches it for what people want, while the majority world preaches it for what people need.”<sup>176</sup> Anderson went as far as to say that he could not find any reference to Kenneth Hagin and other prosperity gospel writers in Cho’s writing, save for Oral Roberts.<sup>177</sup> Anderson seems to be clearly choosing his words with regard to Cho’s writing by saying he can find no direct citation of Hagin. This is a moot point, given that Pentecostal preachers are notorious for not giving credit for the source of their inspiration to anyone but God, a point clearly demonstrated in the life of Hagin and his plagiarism of Kenyon. Allan Park, however, has no difficulty in locating strands of Hagin’s teaching throughout Cho’s theology.<sup>178</sup> This should come as no surprise to anyone who has studied Kate Bowler’s recent publication, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*. Bowler meticulously researched the frequency with which prosperity preachers shared the speaking stage with each other as advertised in *Charisma* magazine, the leading publication of the charismatic movement since its founding in 1975. From Bowler’s research it can be clearly seen that Cho often spoke at conferences which featured Oral Roberts during the decade of the 1980s, but he was even more closely associated with conferences in which Kenneth Hagin was a principal attraction.<sup>179</sup> In the decade of the 1990s, as health issues and advancing age began to curtail the speaking activities of Hagin and Roberts, Bowler’s research shows that Cho was perhaps the most active conference participant in the Word of Faith conferences that were

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<sup>175</sup> Ma, “David Yonggi Cho’s Theology of Blessing,” 158.

<sup>176</sup> Wonsuk Ma, “Pentecostal Worship in Asia: Its Theological Implications and Contributions,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 10, no. 1 (2007): 150.

<sup>177</sup> Anderson, “The Contextual Theology of David Yonggi Cho,” 120.

<sup>178</sup> Park, “David Yonggi Cho and International Pentecostal/Charismatic Movements,” 124.

<sup>179</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 84-85.

advertised in *Charisma*.<sup>180</sup> He frequently shared the stage with such prosperity gospel luminaries as Frederick Price, John Osteen, Oral Robert's son Richard, and Kenneth Copeland.<sup>181</sup> Bowler points out that the reason prosperity gospel preachers in the United States made such similar claims was that "they were so often in each other's presence."<sup>182</sup> This happened because "the highest-attended conferences featured the same roster of speakers, mixed and matched from only a few dozen names."<sup>183</sup> Of these prosperity gospel stars, Bowler comments that "Cho became the patron of American prosperity preachers and a wildly popular conference speaker in his own right." Bowler's research conclusively proves that Cho was influenced by Hagin, Copeland, and other prosperity gospel mavens in the United States. More to the point, he influenced prosperity fans around the world. He was a prosperity gospel star in the neo-Pentecostal community of the West, and as noted by one Korean theological scholar, he was "better known overseas than in Korea."<sup>184</sup>

### **The Shamanism Controversy**

An equally contentious challenge for Cho has been the plethora of charges, from a variety of religious and academic sources, that his strain of Pentecostalism has incorporated significant elements of Korean shamanism. These charges were first leveled against Cho in a 1981 paper written jointly by three Korean academics who were respectively a theologian, a sociologist, and a psychiatrist.<sup>185</sup> These claims were given more prominence in a 1988 doctoral dissertation by Boo-Wong Yoo, who was a student

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<sup>180</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 258.

<sup>181</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 258.

<sup>182</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 87.

<sup>183</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 87.

<sup>184</sup> Sung-Hoon Myung, "The Influence of Rev. Cho's Leadership on the Churches of Korea," in *Charis and Charisma* eds. Sung-Hoon Myung and Young-Gi Hong (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 139.

<sup>185</sup> Park, "David Yonggi Cho and International Pentecostal/Charismatic Movements," 109.

of noted Pentecostal scholar Walter Hollenweger.<sup>186</sup> Harvard's Harvey Cox concluded that anyone schooled in comparative religion would notice that "the worship at the Yoido Full Gospel Church bears a striking resemblance to what is ordinarily known as 'shamanism' but when one points this out to Korean Pentecostal ministers they firmly deny any similarity."<sup>187</sup>

Not surprisingly Pentecostal apologists like Allan Anderson and Wonsuk Ma support the claims of the ministers referred to by Cox. For Anderson, Cho is not displaying syncretism. Instead, he surmises "it is more appropriate to consider Cho's Pentecostalism as a contextual form of Korean Christianity interacting with shamanism."<sup>188</sup> Ma suggests that what Cho's Pentecostalism provides Koreans steeped in shamanism is a "functional substitution" for traditional beliefs.<sup>189</sup> Christianity provides the concepts of forgiveness and salvation, while the shamanistic role of meeting daily needs is appropriated by Cho's theology of blessing.

A scholar who utilizes a more global and less partisan perspective of Christianity in Korea is Chung Soon Lee. He believes that Korean Christianity "has developed with a close relationship with other traditional religious cultures,"<sup>190</sup> citing such similarities as the Buddhist belief in heaven and hell and the shamanistic beliefs in miracles, sacrifices, and priesthood. He posits the question, "what is the difference between Jesus and a Shaman in Pentecostal Christianity today, especially in the matter of healing and exorcism?"<sup>191</sup> He notes: "From my experience in Korea, many elements in the healing

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<sup>186</sup> Park, "David Yonggi Cho and International Pentecostal/Charismatic Movements," 100.

<sup>187</sup> Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, 224.

<sup>188</sup> Anderson, "The Contextual Theology of David Yonggi Cho," 114.

<sup>189</sup> Ma, "David Yonggi Cho's Theology of Blessing: Basis, Legitimacy, and Limitations," 148.

<sup>190</sup> Chung Soon Lee, "The Pentecostal Face of Korean Protestantism: A Critical Understanding," *Asia Journal of Theology* 20, no. 2 (2006), 404.

<sup>191</sup> Lee, "The Pentecostal Face of Korean Protestantism," 412.

service of a Pentecostal revival meeting come from Shamanism.” David Martin observed that Cho’s Yoido Church “aims to ‘find needs and meet needs’ and is not shamed to fuse revivalism and prosperity theology with shamanistic practice.”<sup>192</sup> Another example of an etic academic on this subject is Korean sociologist Andrew Eungi Kim. Kim asserts that, given shamanism’s “emphasis on the appeasements of spirits for the fulfillment of material wishes,”<sup>193</sup> all religions that have migrated to Korea have had to take this aspect of the tradition into account. He observed that Buddhism in Korea has not emphasized meditation or asceticism, but has instead, promoted prayer to “wish-granting” Buddhas like Miruk or Gwanseum.<sup>194</sup> Likewise Christianity has been “shamanized” to appeal to “the materialistic inclination of Koreans.”<sup>195</sup> Kim also highlighted the “this-worldly orientation” of Korean Buddhists and Protestants in that both groups believe that they will be rewarded with good fortune and prosperity when they give offerings to their temple or church.<sup>196</sup>

For Cho, confronting shamans, casting out devils, and praying for prosperity is not shamanism, but is instead the duty of a Pentecostal pastor, just as it was for the apostles of the early Christian church. He also does not see the establishment of his Osan-Ri Prayer Mountain facility as an idea borrowed from shamanism or Buddhism. On the contrary, he associates it with the holy mountains of the Old Testament.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 161.

<sup>193</sup> Andrew Eungi Kim, “Characteristics of Religious Life in South Korea: A Sociological Survey,” *Review of Religious Research* 43, no. 4 (2002): 296.

<sup>194</sup> Kim, “Characteristics of Religious Life in South Korea,” 296.

<sup>195</sup> Kim, “Characteristics of Religious Life in South Korea,” 296.

<sup>196</sup> Kim, “Characteristics of Religious Life in Korea,” 297.

<sup>197</sup> According to Cho three-hundred thousand members of Yoido annually visit the Jasil Choi Memorial International Fasting Prayer Hall at Osan-Ri mountain which is near the North Korean border. This concept of special facilities for prayer and fasting has been emulated by Pentecostal groups throughout the Pacific Rim. See Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups*, 129-130.

Perhaps Harold Bloom made the most accurate observation of this type of religionist in his country when he stated that “Pentecostalism is American shamanism.”<sup>198</sup> According to Bloom, Pentecostals “share with shamans archaic and modern” stigmata, such as “trances, spirit voices, healings through exorcism, manifestations of light or fire, and above all, visionary transport, or prophecy.”<sup>199</sup> He states that central to this belief is “the experience of power.”<sup>200</sup> While Bloom is speaking here of American Pentecostals, his observations about the significance of perceived personal empowerment through the baptism of the Holy Spirit is applicable to wherever Pentecostalism thrives throughout the globe. For Cho and other prosperity gospel adherents, they have taken the concept of power one step further because they believe they have God-like power to improve their material circumstances here on earth, just as shamans have affirmed since the early days of religion.

Cho’s concept of the threefold blessing, with its tenet of improving the material circumstances of believers, is a Korean application of the prosperity gospel. Whether he derived his ideas from Roberts or Hagin, whether he developed them himself, or whether he simply borrowed them from Korean shamanism is irrelevant. What he did that is relevant is that he popularized this theology in Korea and throughout much of the Global South. He did this before many of the other prosperity gospel super stars that are examined in this paper. He was credible in this regard because he had the largest and fastest growing church in Christendom. As such he became the role model for all other prosperity gospel preachers in the Global South, just as he was for many in the West.

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<sup>198</sup> Harold Bloom, *The American Religion* (New York: Chu Hartley Publishers, 1992), 186.

<sup>199</sup> Bloom, *The American Religion*, 186-187.

<sup>200</sup> Bloom, *The American Religion*, 187.



## Cho's Later Years

The question of a successor to Cho began to be contemplated when he turned sixty, despite the fact he showed no signs of slowing down or of relinquishing control of his church empire. The constitution of the Korean Assemblies of God calls for a pastor to retire at the age of seventy, although at the church's request the retirement could be delayed for up to another five years.<sup>201</sup> Cho had indicated in a 2004 interview that he would retire in two years; however in 2006, backed by a nearly unanimous vote from his parishioners, he stated that he would carry on as church leader until 2010.<sup>202</sup>

In many cases in which a religious business empire is established, the founder looks to transfer ownership and power to a family member, particularly a son, as was the case with both Kenneth Hagin and Oral Roberts. No such heir appeared in Cho's family, which was particularly the case for his oldest son, Hee-jun, who had been the chairman of Yoido's daily newspaper. This was in part because of his 2001 arrest for embezzlement and tax evasion in other companies that he operated.<sup>203</sup> As a result, Cho had to go outside his family, grooming Young Hoon Lee to be his spiritual successor. Lee and his family began attending Cho's Seodaemun church when he was an elementary student.<sup>204</sup> He went on to earn several degrees in Korea and a PhD in the Philosophy of Religion from Temple University. Ordained in 1982, Lee became an associate pastor at the Yoido Church and later pastored Yoido-affiliated churches in Washington, D. C., Los Angeles

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<sup>201</sup> Ki-tae Kim, "David Yonggi Cho's Leadership Challenged," *The Korea Times*, January 5, 2006, <http://www.rickross.com/reference/yoidoyonggi/yoido12.html>.

<sup>202</sup> Kim, "David Yonggi Cho's Leadership Challenged."

<sup>203</sup> Kim, "David Yonggi Cho's Leadership Challenged."

<sup>204</sup> Adrienne S. Gaines, "Pruning the World's Largest Church," *Charisma Magazine*, November 2010, <http://www.charismamag.com/site-archives/570-news/featured-news/12072-pruning-the-worlds-largest-church>.

and Tokyo.<sup>205</sup> Cho officially ceded power to Lee in 2008, and while Lee has become the senior pastor of Yoido, it is not clear that Cho has relinquished control of the church he built. Evidence for this assertion surfaced in 2011 when a large group of Yoido church elders accused Cho of embezzling US\$20 million. Other than embarrassment, nothing happened to Cho over that incident, but twenty-eight elders were suspended from the church for being whistleblowers.<sup>206</sup> It did not, however, take long for the arm of the law to act on the financial irregularities of Cho and his family. In December of 2012 Cho's eldest son was booked by the Seoul Central District Prosecutors' Office for breach of trust in causing nearly US\$15 million of damages to the Yoido church.<sup>207</sup> Allegedly the younger Cho sold two hundred and fifty thousand shares of stock from the Next Media Group, of which he was the chairman of the board, for a cost that was four times the value of the market stock; hence the US\$15 million in damages. The senior Cho has been identified as an accomplice in the breach of trust case, and the investigation also found evidence that Cho had been evading income tax and is said to owe \$US5.5 million in taxes.<sup>208</sup> Undaunted by these charges, Cho continues to preach at home and abroad even though he is supposedly retired. The very month that *Christianity Today* published its story on Cho's legal troubles, Cho and Lee headlined the River of Life Conference, a city-wide rally of charismatic churches which was held in the Melbourne Convention Centre.<sup>209</sup> Cho is obviously still a Pentecostal powerhouse.

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<sup>205</sup> Gaines, "Pruning the World's Largest Church."

<sup>206</sup> "Family fraud at million-person church," *Christianity Today*, May, 2013, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/may/gleanings-may-2013>.

<sup>207</sup> "Senior pastor at major church investigated for financial misdeeds," *thehankyoreh*, March 6, 2013, [http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_entertainment/575967.html](http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_entertainment/575967.html).

<sup>208</sup> "Family fraud at million person church," *Christianity Today*, May, 2013, 12, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/may/gleanings-may-2013.html>.

<sup>209</sup> River of Life Conference, 9-10 May, 2013 <http://www.riveroflifeconference.org/>.

## Cho's Legacy

It is important to note that the success of David Yonggi Cho in building the Yoido Full Gospel Church into the world's largest parish parallels the rise of Korea from an impoverished, war-torn nation, to one of the Four Asian Tigers, who along with Japan helped propel economic development in the Pacific Rim from the 1960s to the 1990s. The threefold blessing, Cho's version of the prosperity gospel, found ready acceptance among destitute Koreans who had moved from rural areas to take manufacturing-related jobs in the Seoul metropolitan area, an area which today is home to half of the population of the country. Many of Cho's congregation found a vibrant new community in his church, which they associated, in a spiritual sense, with the modernity that they saw emerging in their country.<sup>210</sup> It was easy to link their improving economic lot in life, which was tied to Korea's expanding manufacturing industries, to the new theology that they found in the Yoido Full Gospel Church.

As significant as Cho's contribution was to the spread of Pentecostalism and charismatic Christianity in Korea, his influence outside of his homeland was equally impressive. When you create, build, and lead the largest church in world, would-be-imitators take notice, and it is Cho's status as a role model for religious entrepreneurs which is perhaps his most significant legacy. For the past four decades of his life he has become an international speaker of note in Pentecostal circles, perhaps the finest example of the networking and "jet-set" genre referred to by academics like Coleman. He has spread his "threefold blessing" version of the prosperity gospel wherever he travels, as

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<sup>210</sup> Andrew Kim notes that those Koreans claiming to be "religious" increased more than six-fold between 1964 to 1994. He points out that five of the world's ten largest churches are located in Seoul. For example the world's largest Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptists churches are found in Seoul, but they are all dwarfed by the Yoido Full Gospel Church of David Yonggi Cho. See Andrew Eungi Kim, "Characteristics of Religious Life in South Korea," 294.

well as his cell group concept of neighbourhood evangelization. The cell group method, with its emphasis on the prominence of female lay leaders, has expanded the roles of women throughout the Pentecostal world. And because of the sheer size of the Yoido Full Gospel Church, thousands of aspiring Pentecostal entrepreneurs, from all three waves of the movement, have travelled to Seoul to study Cho, his church, and his methods.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Two major Global South prosperity preachers who have personally consulted with Cho and who have utilized his church building techniques will be highlighted later in this thesis. They are Harold Caballeros of Guatemala and Enoch Adeboye of Nigeria.

## THE PHILIPPINES

### The Religious Landscape

With a population approaching one hundred million people, the Philippines possesses by far the largest Christian community in Asia. Approximately 81 percent of the country are Catholic, 12 percent are other Christian, 5 percent are Muslim and 2 percent are classified as “others.”<sup>212</sup> Before the Spanish and Christianity arrived in the archipelago in 1565, animism was the major religious system, save for the southern islands of Mindanao and Sulu, where Islam had become entrenched. The Tagalog practice of monotheism, centred on their supreme being, Bathala, proved to be a cosmology compatible with Catholicism.<sup>213</sup> A similar consonance was found between the indigenous pantheon of spirits and the Catholic affinity for saints and angels. This eased the conversion process and enabled Catholicism to take root throughout most of the Philippines by the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>214</sup>

Protestantism, in the form of the historic mission churches, descended on the Philippines in the late nineteenth century, after the US took control of the archipelago in the wake of their defeat of the Spanish in the Spanish-American War. Missionaries from the ranks of the Episcopalians, Methodists, Baptists, Christian and Missionary Alliance, and the Seventh-Day Adventists all planted missions within three years of the end of the conflict.<sup>215</sup> After Philippine Independence in 1946 another wave of mission churches appeared, primarily Pentecostal in theology, led by the Assemblies of God and the

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<sup>212</sup> Katherine L. Wiegler, “Everyday Catholicism: Expanding the Sacred Sphere in the Philippines” in *Everyday Life in Southeast Asia*, eds. Kathleen M. Adam and Kathleen A. Gillogly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 166.

<sup>213</sup> Christine Kessler and Jurgen Ruland, *Give Jesus a Hand! Charismatic Christians: Populist Religion and Politics in the Philippines*, (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2008), 32.

<sup>214</sup> Kessler and Ruland, *Give Jesus a Hand!*

<sup>215</sup> Kessler and Ruland, *Give Jesus a Hand!*, 45.

Foursquare Church.<sup>216</sup> Unlike countries in Latin America, however, that had experienced a Spanish/Portuguese colonial past with a Catholic monopoly in the religious sphere, the Philippines did not see a large segment of its population turn to Protestantism when the state became more secular. Instead, as Pentecostalism and charismatic Christianity spread during the 1970s and 1980s, Filipinos impacted by this movement turned increasingly to charismatic renewal within the Catholic Church. As a result, the percentage of members in the Catholic Church has remained stable in the Philippines, as opposed to a significant drop in many Latin American countries.<sup>217</sup> It is within this milieu of charismatic Christianity, centred in the Catholic Church of the Philippines, that the El Shaddai movement emerged, the first and sole prosperity gospel community in the entire world of Catholicism.

### **El Shaddai**

In 1981, Mariano “Mike” Velarde, a real estate broker and land developer, began a Manila-based non-denominational Christian radio program that focused on healing.<sup>218</sup> For three years it garnered modest attention, and most who listened assumed that Velarde was a Protestant. At the urging of a priest, who asked Velarde if he wanted “to deal with the majority of the people or with the minority,” “Brother Mike,” as he had come to be known, declared himself to be a Catholic and joined the newly formed Catholic Secretariat for Charismatics.<sup>219</sup> This proved to be the turning point in Velarde’s ministry. Within a fifteen year period he attracted as many as ten million followers scattered across the Philippines and in thirty-five countries around the world which are home to the

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<sup>216</sup> Kessler and Ruland, *Give Jesus a Hand!*, 66.

<sup>217</sup> Kessler and Ruland, *Give Jesus a Hand!*, 90.

<sup>218</sup> Katherine L. Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles: El Shaddai and the Transformation of Popular Catholicism in the Philippines* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005), 4.

<sup>219</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 19.

Philippine diaspora.<sup>220</sup> Velarde called his movement “El Shaddai” which he explains to his followers means “God Almighty” or “the God who is more than enough.”<sup>221</sup> He appropriated this sobriquet from a 1980 booklet written by Kenneth Hagin entitled *El Shaddai*<sup>222</sup> and he adopted a hymn with the same name, written by Kenneth Copeland, as the theme song for his ministry.<sup>223</sup>

### **The Development of the El Shaddai Theology**

Velarde has borrowed freely, according to Katherine Wiegele, from several prosperity gospel stalwarts in the United States. In addition to the aforementioned Hagin and Copeland, Brother Mike utilizes the “seed-faith principle” which echoes the teachings of Oral Roberts.<sup>224</sup> He refers to his followers as “prayer partners,” as did Jim and Tammy Bakker,<sup>225</sup> and he models much of his television and radio ministry after Pat Robertson’s *700 Club* television show.<sup>226</sup> Also like Roberts and Hagin, he claims a miraculous healing; in his case from heart disease, which enables him to speak more authoritatively about the power of divine healing.<sup>227</sup>

In a-not-too subtle reference to his Catholic heritage, Velarde professed in an interview with Wiegele that the goal of his ministry is to “free people from the bondage of religion.”<sup>228</sup> In doing so he teaches the opposite of traditional Catholic doctrine about the merits of poverty, humility, and of accepting one’s cross on earth in the hope of

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<sup>220</sup> Wiegele, “Everyday Catholicism,” 168.

<sup>221</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 4.

<sup>222</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 23.

<sup>223</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 25.

<sup>224</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 20.

<sup>225</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 26.

<sup>226</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 18-21.

<sup>227</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 18.

<sup>228</sup> Wiegele, “Everyday Catholicism,” 173.

gaining paradise and eternal life in the next world.<sup>229</sup> Instead Velarde preaches that paradise can be achieved now, in this life, if one follows the tenets of the prosperity gospel, chief of which is tithing. Expanding on the principle of “seed-faith,” Velarde states that “if you invest nothing, you receive nothing.”<sup>230</sup> Instilling his followers with what Kessler and Ruland refer to as “an impressive optimism,” Velarde teaches that tithing and “love offerings” produce both healing miracles and material benefits, and that ultimately God will return far more than He ever receives in offerings.<sup>231</sup>

Velarde’s prosperity message obviously contradicts the long-standing teachings of the Church, earning the ire of many officials, but he has carved out an independent space for himself in the Catholic community of the Philippines. This is because of his success in keeping his followers in the Catholic fold rather than having them cross over to Pentecostal churches as has happened in many parts of the Global South. At his rallies, which are never held on Sundays in deference to local Catholic services, he always has a mass performed by a priest,<sup>232</sup> and a portion of offerings collected at some meetings are directed to Catholic parishes.<sup>233</sup> Using such methods has allowed El Shaddai to remain at arm’s length from the Church while at the same time permitting its members to retain their Catholic identity. All of this provides Velarde the freedom he requires to be as independent as any prosperity preacher in the USA or Africa, while at the same time providing him the opportunity to tap into the majority Catholic community of the Philippines.

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<sup>229</sup> Kessler and Ruland, *Give Jesus a Hand!*, 126.

<sup>230</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 20.

<sup>231</sup> Kessler and Ruland, *Give Jesus a Hand!*, 128-129.

<sup>232</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 8

<sup>233</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 179, n. 18.



## El Shaddai Composition

The perception in the Philippine press and media is that members of El Shaddai belong to the *masa* or the lower and lower-middle classes,<sup>234</sup> a contention that is also reinforced by Kessler and Ruland's sociological study.<sup>235</sup> According to El Shaddai's Social Services arm, 80 percent of the movement live below the Philippines' national poverty line with approximately 15 percent spilling over into the "petty bourgeois" class of small-scale entrepreneurs.<sup>236</sup> Wiegele characterized the majority of her informants as members of the working poor who commute as much as three hours a day to labour at such jobs as painters, construction workers, domestics and street vendors.<sup>237</sup>

They reside for the most part in the slums of Manila and the regional capitals scattered across the island nation. Of those in Manila, many can trace their ancestry back to impoverished farmers and laborers who migrated in the 1950s and 1960s to the brighter lights of the big city.<sup>238</sup> While that rural-urban flow has continued in the ensuing decades, increasingly, from the 1980s on, many Filipinos have moved abroad in search of work.<sup>239</sup> El Shaddai has established overseas chapters for these workers, who comprise as much as 20 percent of the movement's ten million followers.<sup>240</sup> Velarde makes several overseas trips each year to cater to these chapters, which Kessler and Ruland state provide a community from which fellow migrants can draw strength.<sup>241</sup> Wiegele points

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<sup>234</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 81.

<sup>235</sup> Kessler and Ruland, *Give Jesus a Hand!*, 123.

<sup>236</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 81.

<sup>237</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 81.

<sup>238</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 65-66. In the particular slum where Wiegele lived while conducting her ethnography, most of the residents had parents or grandparents who had moved from the impoverished islands of Leyte and Samar to the southeast of Manila.

<sup>239</sup> Kessler and Ruland, *Give Jesus a Hand!*, 159. Kessler and Ruland quote Philippine government sources which estimate that in 2003, more than seven million Filipinos worked abroad, many of them illegally. Their remittances, in 1995, contributed over 6 percent of the GNP.

<sup>240</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 4.

<sup>241</sup> Kessler and Ruland, *Give Jesus a Hand!*, 151.

out that the overseas workers of the El Shaddai movement are a rich source of foreign currency tithes, which may explain the care and attention they receive from Brother Mike.<sup>242</sup>

### **The Throngs**

Over the three decades of its existence, the single most significant aspect of the El Shaddai movement has been its size. According to Wiegele, outsiders see their “numbers” as “awesome.”<sup>243</sup> The reputed ten million followers represent approximately 10 percent of the Philippine population. This has certainly attracted the attention of politicians. What most Filipinos have associated with El Shaddai, however, are the gargantuan Saturday rallies Brother Mike has staged for his adherents. At the outset of his ministry Velarde utilized rented halls to gather his followers for the weekly rallies, but as the crowds multiplied he moved to ever larger venues, going from public parks to baseball stadiums to more than sixty thousand square metres of lawn in front of the Philippine International Convention Centre beside Manila Bay.<sup>244</sup> These rallies, known locally as a *gawain* or “happening,”<sup>245</sup> attract crowds that number between five hundred thousand and one million people.<sup>246</sup> Only a few thousand people can actually see the main stage, while the rest take in the *gawain* by watching large video screens set up around the grounds.<sup>247</sup> To outsiders, these five-to-ten hour meetings<sup>248</sup> create massive congestion in Manila and tie up traffic for the entire day as attendees arrive from all over

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<sup>242</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 29.

<sup>243</sup> Wiegele, “Everyday Catholicism,” 174.

<sup>244</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 76.

<sup>245</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 45.

<sup>246</sup> Kessler and Ruland, *Give Jesus a Hand!*, 176.

<sup>247</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 48.

<sup>248</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 1.

Manila as well as far-flung provinces throughout the archipelago.<sup>249</sup> For those in attendance, however, the *gawain* “creates a feeling of *comunitas* that participants find transforming and empowering.”<sup>250</sup> As Wiegele put it, for a few hours this crowd of the impoverished see themselves as “significant and in a sense demarginalized.”<sup>251</sup>

### **The *Gawain***

Most of the attendees at a *gawain* come expecting a miracle, as do prosperity gospel enthusiasts around the world. To prepare for the highlights of the rally which include the offerings, the sermon by Brother Mike, and his prayer for the believers, the participants engage in several hours of hymns, music, and a mass, and they also listen to many testimonies from El Shaddai members whose lives have been transformed by answered prayer.<sup>252</sup> When Velarde finally arrives on stage he always delivers a sermon that he terms a “healing message” which is predicated on “positive confession” by the believers and assures them of good health and financial prosperity.<sup>253</sup> A colorful feature of Velarde sermons is the blessing of objects. Before each rally, participants are advised through radio and television broadcasts to bring items that symbolize their most passionate desires. At the culmination of his sermon Velarde asks those in attendance to lift these objects into the air while he prays for their requests. Objects that are typically “raised up” at El Shaddai rallies include Bibles, special El Shaddai handkerchiefs, bank savings books, wallets, purses, passports, visa applications for work abroad, and job and school applications, all of which have religious or financial implications.<sup>254</sup> As well,

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<sup>249</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 48.

<sup>250</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 55.

<sup>251</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 48.

<sup>252</sup> For a thorough description of a typical *gawain* at the Philippine International Convention Centre see Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 44-50.

<sup>253</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 19.

<sup>254</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 32.

objects such as raw eggs, candles, and flowers are lifted up to improve the health of the believer.<sup>255</sup> An all-purpose object that Velarde regularly asks his followers to lift skyward to catch “blessings from heaven” is an inverted umbrella.<sup>256</sup> For special occasions Velarde has been known to hire helicopters to circle his crowds and drop El Shaddai handkerchiefs, autographed by himself and anchored by miniature oranges, into “hordes of screaming revelers,” who are anxious to procure an officially blessed object to assist them in facilitating a miracle.<sup>257</sup> Scenes such as these, which resemble local shamanic traditions, and mirror traditional conceptions of charisma and sacred spiritual power, have created, according to Wiegele, a “revitalized spiritual arena” which has been appropriated by Brother Mike and the El Shaddai movement within Catholicism.<sup>258</sup>

### **Getting the El Shaddai Message Out**

There is more to El Shaddai, however, than just the massive crowds. From its outset as a radio program, El Shaddai has become increasingly media savvy and a major player in the Philippine communications industry.<sup>259</sup> The radio station that aired Velarde’s first sermon, DWXI, was eventually purchased by El Shaddai, and by the time of Wiegele’s research it had become the third most popular AM outlet in Metro Manila.<sup>260</sup> In 1997, Velarde, along with Pastor Eddie Villanueva, Pentecostal leader of the Jesus Is Lord group, jointly purchased Manila’s channel 11 and transformed it into the nation’s most prominent religious television programmer.<sup>261</sup> In addition, El Shaddai purchased extensive radio and television broadcast time on other outlets throughout the

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<sup>255</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*.

<sup>256</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 114.

<sup>257</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 82.

<sup>258</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 172.

<sup>259</sup> Interestingly the official name of the movement is El Shaddai DWXI Prayer Partners Foundation International. See Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 42.

<sup>260</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 43.

<sup>261</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 44.

country<sup>262</sup> and in overseas locales where several El Shaddai chapters are located, such as Hong Kong and California.<sup>263</sup>

There can be no doubt that the El Shaddai message is continuously heard throughout the Philippines, and to ensure that it is reinforced the organization has created local chapters. These chapters, ostensibly under the direction of a parish priest, are in actuality run by lay preachers trained by Velarde's organization. The lay preachers, in keeping with Catholic tradition, are exclusively male, unlike other charismatic and Pentecostal groups that offer some leadership roles to women.<sup>264</sup> They hold weekly prayer meetings in barrio locations such as basketball and badminton courts, and they make house calls to pray for the sick and counsel El Shaddai members and their families.<sup>265</sup> Overseas chapters of El Shaddai are also staffed by lay preachers, the most proficient of whom circulate regularly between posts across the country and globally.<sup>266</sup>

### **The Movement Matures**

Since the turn of the century El Shaddai, still under the control of Velarde, and increasingly his family, has undertaken several initiatives that reflect the maturation the movement is experiencing. It has, for example, become steadily more involved in the politics of the nation, not surprising given the latent bloc voting power of the group. This potential is borne out by a 1999 survey of El Shaddai members in which 70 percent of those questioned stated that they "believed in everything that their leader, Mike Velarde,

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<sup>262</sup> Wiegele, "Everyday Catholicism," 170.

<sup>263</sup> Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles*, 43.

<sup>264</sup> Kessler and Ruland, *Give Jesus a Hand!*, 134.

<sup>265</sup> Wiegele, "The Prosperity Gospel among Filipino Catholic Charismatics," in *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socio-Economics of the Global Charismatic Movement*, eds. Katherine Attanasi and Amos Yong (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 172.

<sup>266</sup> Wiegele, "The Prosperity Gospel among Filipino Catholic Charismatics," 173.

says.<sup>267</sup> During this same time period Velarde was seen as the trusted spiritual advisor<sup>268</sup> of Philippine President Joseph Estrada, who served from 1998 to 2001.<sup>269</sup> While Estrada was President, El Shaddai created the pro-life *Buhay* political party, which since then has steadily won Congressional seats.<sup>270</sup> Velarde actually tested the political waters in 2010, openly toying with the idea of running for President himself, before eventually deciding to remain on the sidelines.<sup>271</sup>

On the religious front, El Shaddai has made several moves that reflect its growing social clout in the country. In 2009 it altered its long-standing policy of not owning a building for church services, in deference to Catholic cathedrals around the country, by opening a huge worship centre in Paranaque City, an affluent suburb of Manila. Not surprisingly, the church property was built within the Marvel City real estate development, which is owned by Mike Velarde.<sup>272</sup> Known as the El Shaddai International House of Prayer, it was constructed on more than two acres of land and claims a seating capacity of 15,000, a standing-room capacity of 25,000, and an overflow capacity of 200,000, making it the largest place of worship in Asia.<sup>273</sup> It is from this venue that Velarde now conducts his Saturday rallies. In addition to this structure, El

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<sup>267</sup> Kessler and Ruland, *Give Jesus a Hand!*, 175.

<sup>268</sup> Kessler and Ruland, 169.

<sup>269</sup> Estrada, who first gained fame in the Philippines as an actor, appearing in more than a hundred films, was elected president in 1998 by the largest margin ever. Three years later he was thrown out of office for corruption and was tried and convicted for “plunder” of state funds and for accepting millions of dollars in bribes from illegal gambling syndicates. He was sentenced to life in prison in 2007 but was pardoned by the new president. He ran unsuccessfully for President in 2010, but in 2013 his political fortunes changed when he was elected mayor of Manila. See “Joseph Estrada elected mayor of Manila.” *BBC News Asia*, May 14, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-22525032>.

<sup>270</sup> Under the Philippine constitution 20 percent of the seats in Congress are allocated for sectoral representatives. A sectoral party can earn as many as three seats which *Buhay* was able to do in the election of 2007 when it topped the sectoral parties in votes. In the 2001, 2004 and 2010 elections the party was able to win two seats in Congress. See Gil C. Cabacungan, “What rift?—Buhay,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, April 19, 2013, <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/393357/what-rift-buhay>.

<sup>271</sup> Wiegele, “The Prosperity Gospel among Filipino Catholic Charismatics,” 173.

<sup>272</sup> Wiegele, “Everyday Catholicism,” 175.

<sup>273</sup> Wiegele, “Everyday Catholicism,”

Shaddai has also established the College of Divine Wisdom, an institution which provides higher education and professional training along with “El Shaddai spirituality.”<sup>274</sup> With regard to his lay ministers, Velarde has recently upgraded and systematized the training and supervision of these pivotal workers, befitting an organization that is becoming institutionalized.<sup>275</sup>

By any measure Brother Mike has created a religious empire that has made him and his family fabulously wealthy. In turn, his massive following, (see figure 4)<sup>276</sup> has provided him with immense political impact, and he has access to the highest corridors of power in the Philippines. It is no wonder that *Asiaweek* named him, in 1996, as one of the fifty most powerful people in Asia.<sup>277</sup> Since then his stature has only grown, and the El Shaddai movement remains a potent force in the religious community of the Philippines.

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<sup>274</sup> Wiegele, “The Prosperity Gospel among Filipino Catholic Charismatics,” 173.

<sup>275</sup> Wiegele, “The Prosperity Gospel among Filipino Catholic Charismatics,” 178.

<sup>276</sup> Figure 4. Hundreds of thousands of Filipinos regularly gather for open-air services in Manila. “El Shaddai evening rally,” photograph, 2007, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/garmisch/420903700/>, (accessed February 3, 2014).

<sup>277</sup> “Asiaweek’s 50 Most Powerful People in Asia,” *Asiaweek*, July 5, 1996, <http://www-cgi.cnn.com/ASIANOW/asiaweek/96/0705/feat3.html>.



**Figure 4:** *El Shaddai evening rally, Manila.*



## INDONESIA AND MALAYSIA

### The Religious Landscape

Jutting out from the Asian landmass at the juncture of the Indian and Pacific oceans, the countries of Indonesia and Malaysia represent the eastern fringe of the expansion of Islam. Arriving first at the northern end of Sumatra a millennium ago with Arab sailors and merchants plying the spice trade, Islam spread slowly along the coast of Sumatra, Java, and the Malay Peninsula before moving inland and to other major islands farther east in the archipelago. Five hundred years ago the Portuguese became the first of the European nations to set up trading posts in the area. Along with their quest for spices they brought a dislike for Islam and an interest in spreading Catholicism, which took root in some scattered eastern islands, such as Ambon, under the direction of St. Francis Xavier. The Dutch, initially in the guise of the Dutch East Indies Company, administered the bulk of the territory which would become Indonesia. Their primary interest, however, was commerce. They paid scant attention to religion, which allowed Islam to gain an ever stronger foothold in the area. A similar approach was taken by the British with the Malay Peninsula, under the auspices of the British East Indies Company. The British controlled the peninsula, but Islam became the religion of choice among the Malay population. Some of the Protestant historic mission churches established themselves in Indonesia and Malaysia in the nineteenth century, with their focus being on the European and non-Muslim population. Pentecostals targeted the same ethnic groups when they arrived in the region in the 1920s.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Tan Jin Huat, "Pentecostals and Charismatics in Malaysia and Singapore," in *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, eds. Allan Anderson & Edmond Tang (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 227.

Today the population of Indonesia is approaching two hundred and fifty million, and with 88 percent of that number being Muslim, it is the largest Islamic country in the world.<sup>279</sup> Much smaller Malaysia has a population nearing thirty million, of which 61 percent are Muslim. The Christian populations of Indonesian and Malaysia are estimated to be 10 and 9 percent of their respective countries.<sup>280</sup> Both nations also contain a myriad of ethnic groups, including a significant number of ethnic Chinese, the subject of study in this section of this thesis.

### **The Chinese Diaspora in Indonesia and Malaysia**

The Chinese have played a dominant role in the economic life of Southeast Asia since before the days of Admiral Cheng Ho, who visited Chinese trading communities throughout the region on his famous voyages of discovery in the fifteenth century.<sup>281</sup> In the nineteenth century, however, due to a series of wars and famines, thousands of impoverished Chinese from the southern provinces of the Middle Kingdom migrated in waves to cities throughout Southeast Asia, a migration that continued well into the twentieth century. Most arrived destitute and were compelled to take menial jobs. When the ethnic Chinese attained some economic footing, they found that they were often prevented from owning land or becoming public servants. As a result they were forced

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<sup>279</sup> Barbara Watson Andaya, "Contextualizing the Global: Exploring the Roots of Pentecostalism in Malaysia and Indonesia," 3-4. (Paper presented to a symposium on Management and Marketing of Globalizing Asian Religions, Osaka, Japan, August 12, 2009), [www.r.minpaku.ac.jp/nakahiro/english/.../Andaya%20Full%20paper.pdf](http://www.r.minpaku.ac.jp/nakahiro/english/.../Andaya%20Full%20paper.pdf).

<sup>280</sup> Andaya, "Contextualizing the Global," 4.

<sup>281</sup> Amy Chua, *World On Fire: How Exporting Free Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred And Global Instability* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 31.

into entrepreneurial activities, which over the long-run proved most fortuitous financially.<sup>282</sup>

Today the population of Indonesia is officially comprised of three million ethnic Chinese who make up 1.5 percent of the population.<sup>283</sup> In Malaysia the six million ethnic Chinese comprise just over one quarter of the population.<sup>284</sup> Despite their relatively small numbers, they dominate the economies of both nations. They control more than 70 percent of the private, non-state, businesses in Indonesia, while in Malaysia they oversee 50 percent of the national assets and hold 60 percent of the GDP.<sup>285</sup>

The ethnic Chinese in Indonesia and Malaysia are well-off economically, but as Paul Freston has argued, they “lack cultural legitimacy,” which sees them being marginalized politically.<sup>286</sup> Throughout their history in Indonesia and Malaysia the ethnic Chinese have been treated as outsiders and have often suffered severe discrimination. The New Economic Policy of Malaysia, instituted in 1971, forced Chinese companies to take on Malay partners in an effort to reduce the economic imbalance between the indigenous population and the ethnic Chinese.<sup>287</sup> In Indonesia the Suharto government attempted to force the assimilation of the ethnic Chinese after the bloody civil strife that followed the overthrow of President Sukharno in 1967.<sup>288</sup> When Suharto was eventually forced from office in 1998 the ethnic Chinese were seen as

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<sup>282</sup> Juliette Koning and Heidi Dahles, “Spiritual Power: Ethnic Chinese Managers and the Rise of Charismatic Christianity in Southeast Asia,” *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies* 27, no. 1 (2009): 12.

<sup>283</sup> Leo Suryadinata, Evi Nurvidya and Aris Ananta, *Indonesia's Population: Ethnicity and Religion in a Changing Political Landscape* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003), 79.

<sup>284</sup> Koning and Dahles, “Spiritual Power,” 12.

<sup>285</sup> Koning and Dahles, “Spiritual Power,” 12-13.

<sup>286</sup> Paul Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 76.

<sup>287</sup> Koning and Dahles, “Spiritual Power,” 13.

<sup>288</sup> Koning and Dahles, “Spiritual Power.”

scapegoats, and anti-Chinese riots broke out in several Indonesian cities, most notably in Jakarta, where businesses and homes were put to the torch and many ethnic Chinese women were raped.<sup>289</sup>

### **A Religious Conversion**

This background information provides the frame of reference for the recent remarkable conversion of many ethnic Chinese of Indonesia and Malaysia to Pentecostalism. This conversion is not, for the most part, a conversion to classical Pentecostalism, but rather to the charismatic and neo-Pentecostal phases of the movement with a heavy emphasis on the prosperity gospel. In the 1930s the noted evangelist, John Sung,<sup>290</sup> from Fujian province in China, made several evangelistic tours through Southeast Asia, including locales such as Singapore, Malaysia,<sup>291</sup> Java, and several outer islands of Indonesia.<sup>292</sup> In his day, Sung would have been difficult to classify in a religious sense, but today he would probably be termed a charismatic Methodist. His revival meetings were apparently filled with miracles, but he is best remembered for his extremely animated preaching style. He focused on the ethnic Chinese community, and while he is still remembered favorably, like many evangelists, his impact was short-term and it did not lead to a significant Pentecostal community in any of the Southeast Asian countries he toured. Most ethnic Chinese retained the folk religions that they and their ancestors brought from China along with the ethics of Confucianism. The small Christian community that existed among the ethnic Chinese was primarily centred, like it was throughout the Global South at this time, in the historic mission churches.

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<sup>289</sup> Koning and Dahles, "Spiritual Power," 17.

<sup>290</sup> Hwa Yung, "Pentecostalism and the Asian Church," in *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, eds. Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 38.

<sup>291</sup> Tan Jin Huat, "Pentecostals and Charismatics in Malaysia and Singapore," 231.

<sup>292</sup> Mark Robinson, "The Growth of Indonesian Pentecostalism," in *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, eds. Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 268.

All of this changed when the charismatic wave of the 1970s came to Southeast Asia. In the 1960s Pentecostals comprised about a quarter of all evangelical Christians in Malaysia, but by 1985 they had grown to be 75 percent of that group.<sup>293</sup> Tan Jin Huat notes that from the 1970s onward Pentecostal and charismatic churches increasingly stressed a “blessings theology.”<sup>294</sup> This is not surprising since prosperity gospel luminaries such as David Yonggi Cho, T.L. Osborne, and Morris Cerullo were active in the region promoting church growth, seed faith, and prosperity teachings.<sup>295</sup> During the same period many chapters of the Full Gospel Businessmen’s Fellowship sprang up in the charismatic community of the region. They were populated primarily by the same people who were attracted to the prosperity gospel theology.<sup>296</sup> In Indonesia, Pentecostalism and the prosperity gospel began to grow as the country modernized in the early 1980s, and it surged again in the aftermath of the overthrow of Suharto in 1998, when many persecuted ethnic Chinese were drawn to the movement.<sup>297</sup>

### **An Ethnographic Study of the Charismatic Ethnic Chinese Business Community**

Juliette Koning and Heidi Dahles, two social anthropologists from the Netherlands, were the first social scientists to explore the remarkable world of the charismatic ethnic Chinese business community in Indonesia and Malaysia. In 2009 they conducted fieldwork with two groups of primarily male business owners and managers, one located in the city of Yogyakarta on the island of Java and the other in a suburb of Kuala Lumpur.<sup>298</sup> These business managers were third or fourth generation ethnic Chinese who were primarily mainline Protestant or Catholic before they converted,

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<sup>293</sup> Tan Jin Huat, “Pentecostals and Charismatics in Malaysia and Singapore,” 230.

<sup>294</sup> Huat, “Pentecostals and Charismatics in Malaysia and Singapore,” 230.

<sup>295</sup> Huat, “Pentecostals and Charismatics in Malaysia and Singapore,” 238.

<sup>296</sup> Huat, “Pentecostals and Charismatics in Malaysia and Singapore,” 241.

<sup>297</sup> Koning and Dahles, “Spiritual Power,” 16.

<sup>298</sup> Koning and Dahles, “Spiritual Power,” 8.

although a few listed Confucianism as their background.<sup>299</sup> All came to their new faith while experiencing periods of personal or professional problems that were often compounded by their contested citizenship or minority ethnic position.<sup>300</sup> The problems that these business people referred to were in some cases similar to issues that would be found anywhere in the world, such as family or employee difficulties. Others, such as dealing with the endemic corruption of the region, particularly in Indonesia, cause unique challenges for the ethnic Chinese business owners and managers. As one noted, being Christian and Chinese “we cannot join practical politics.”<sup>301</sup>

What the charismatic community offers, in the form of the Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship International, is a venue for the ethnic Chinese managers to share, in a safe environment, challenges they are confronting. According to one member from Yogyakarta, “Full Gospel is a good place for Christians who run a business. Their problems are not discussed in the churches they go to. But at Full Gospel they do.”<sup>302</sup> Quite naturally, friendships develop, business information is exchanged, and a network of resources evolves, all based on the assumption that they are the “chosen” and favored people of God.<sup>303</sup>

During the past twenty years in Southeast Asia there have been some sharp economic reversals in a period that has generally seen a strong upward trajectory. This seems to dovetail nicely with the prosperity gospel theology which “offers answers, both in times of plenty (endorsing wealth creation) and in times of hardship (giving guidance

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<sup>299</sup> Koning and Dahles, “Spiritual Power,” 9-10.

<sup>300</sup> Koning and Dahles, “Spiritual Power,” 19.

<sup>301</sup> Koning and Dahles, “Spiritual Power,” 20.

<sup>302</sup> Koning and Dahles, “Spiritual Power,” 24.

<sup>303</sup> Koning and Dahles, “Spiritual Power.”

in times of insecurity.)”<sup>304</sup> At all times the informants of Koning and Dahles tithe, but when times are good, in addition to tithing, they donate money to worthy causes of Christian charity, such as supporting orphanages or starting Christian schools.<sup>305</sup> They do this fully expecting to be rewarded by God for their largess, as one would expect from a group of prosperity gospel devotees.<sup>306</sup>

According to the researchers, this “blending” of religious beliefs, ethnicity, and business among the ethnic Chinese business community of Indonesia and Malaysia has produced a unique form of social and cultural capital.<sup>307</sup> Within the Chinese diaspora of Southeast Asia, this charismatic ethnic Chinese business community is indeed unique. As Amy Chau points out, the situation of the ethnic Chinese is markedly different in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.<sup>308</sup> In these countries there is not any strong ethnic Chinese animus, because the Chinese have largely assimilated with the local population. Not surprisingly, there is also not a strong Pentecostal movement within these countries, and where there are Pentecostal pockets, the ethnic Chinese are not major participants.

### **Some Reflections on the Prosperity Gospel in Asia**

In the spring of 2013, Alessandro Speciale, a Vatican-based journalist, penned an article for the Union of Catholic Asian News, an independent Catholic news network based in Hong Kong. In the article, Speciale outlined the many gains that Pentecostals had made in the region, acknowledging that “40 percent of Asian Christians define

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<sup>304</sup> Koning and Dahles, “Spiritual Power,” 6.

<sup>305</sup> Koning and Dahles, “Spiritual Power,” 26.

<sup>306</sup> Koning and Dahles, “Spiritual Power,” 29.

<sup>307</sup> Koning and Dahles, “Spiritual Power.”

<sup>308</sup> Chau, *World On Fire*, 31.

themselves as charismatic or Pentecostal.”<sup>309</sup> Speciale’s insightful report provided accurate information about Pentecostal expansion, but he included one sentence that was curiously off the mark, compared with the balance of the story. Speciale commented:

Unlike in Latin America, and with the exception of South Korea and – though reliable data is hard to come by – China, Pentecostal groups in Asia do not emphasize the ‘gospel of prosperity,’ which puts a direct link between faith and economic success.<sup>310</sup>

This sentence represented either wishful thinking on the part of Speciale, or he is grossly misinformed. As Speciale implies, it is hard to miss the prosperity gospel in Korea, where it dominates Pentecostalism, but what he doesn’t acknowledge is the fact that it has also crossed over into the charismatic community, amongst some Presbyterians in particular. Alessandro comments in his article on the charismatic nature of the El Shaddai group in the Philippines, but he does not refer to their unique position within Catholicism as an openly practicing group of prosperity gospel adherents. Furthermore, within the minority Pentecostal community of the Philippines, the prosperity gospel is as common as glossolalia. Alessandro has also completely missed the prosperity gospel orientation of the Chinese diaspora in Malaysia and Indonesia, highlighted by Koning and Dahles above. The overt prosperity gospel praxis of the majority ethnic Chinese community in Singapore might also have been mentioned by Alessandro along with a growing prosperity orientation in some sectors of Pentecostal community in India.<sup>311</sup> In short, wherever one finds Protestantism in the world, one finds Pentecostalism and

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<sup>309</sup> Alessandro Speciale, “In Asia, the Pentecostals are on the march,” *UCANews*, April 15, 2013, <http://www.ucanews.com/news/in-asia-the-pentecostals-are-on-the-march-/68010>.

<sup>310</sup> Alessandro Speciale, “In Asia, the Pentecostals are on the march.”

<sup>311</sup> For a nuanced theological examination of the prosperity gospel in Singapore see Gerard Jacob, *The Pursuit & Acquisition of Health and Wealth: A Theological Critique of a Cultural Influence on Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity in a Contemporary Singaporean Context* (Bloomington: WestBow Press, 2012). For some insight into US and Asian style televangelism in India see Jonathan D. James, *McDonaldisation, Masala, McGospel, and Om Economics: Televangelism in Contemporary India* (New Dehli: Sage Publications Pvt. Ltd., 2010).



wherever Pentecostalism has taken root, so too has the prosperity gospel. Unfortunately, journalist Alessandro is like most in the western world and much of academia, in that they have missed the prosperity gospel phenomenon that is sweeping through the Global South.

## CHAPTER THREE

### LATIN AMERICA

#### The Religious Landscape

Latin America has been known for the last few centuries as the most Catholic region of the world. This is because for the bulk of the last five hundred years Catholicism, the state religion of the monarchies of Spain and Portugal and then later the independent counties of Latin America, has held a “de facto spiritual monopoly” over America, south of the United States.<sup>312</sup> Below the surface of this imposing religious monopoly, however, things were not as robust as they appeared, for over this period never more than 15 percent of the population have actively attended church and participated in the faith.<sup>313</sup> There were also few priests to serve the overall population, and those who were clerics concentrated their efforts on the political and bureaucratic elite. Further helping to distance themselves from the lower classes was the fact that most priests were foreign born, thus making it challenging for parishioners to relate to their spiritual leaders.<sup>314</sup> Such conditions would allow the forces of Pentecostalism to take hold in the region in the second half of the twentieth century.

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<sup>312</sup> R. Andrew Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits: Latin America's New Religious Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 8.

<sup>313</sup> Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits*, 9.

<sup>314</sup> Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits*, 27. Chesnut points out that to this day, the only country in Latin America to have any success in recruiting a significant amount of native born priests has been Columbia.

## **BRAZIL**

By far the largest country in population and area in Latin America is Brazil, and it dominates the region in a myriad of ways. As for its religious history, it follows the pattern outlined above, as Jesuits dominated the religious affairs during the colonial period. After independence in 1824, freedom of religion was introduced in the new constitution, which prompted the historic Protestant mission denominations to establish churches to serve the needs of European immigrants who disembarked along the Brazilian coast throughout the nineteenth century. Despite the arrival of small streams of Protestants, the Catholic church continued to dominate the religious playing field, and it was not until 1891 that legislation appeared to separate the church from the state.<sup>315</sup>

What has to be recognized about Brazil, however, is that it is a highly stratified society, a carryover in large part from the Atlantic slave trade which was not abolished in that country until 1888. More than four million Africans had been brought to Brazil in bondage over the three centuries of the Atlantic slave trade, and by the time of its demise, the slaves, both African and American born, comprised more than a third of the population of the country.<sup>316</sup> These African slaves brought their indigenous religion with them, and despite prolonged attempts by the church at their conversion, many Afro-Brazilians retained their religious traditions. These African religious rites, largely Yoruba in origin, became known as Candomble in Brazil. An offshoot of Candomble, and also popular in Brazil, is Umbanda, which developed in the twentieth century as a syncretic blend of Catholicism, Kardecism (or French spiritism), and West African religions. What occurred in Brazil was that the African religions and their derivatives

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<sup>315</sup> Martin, *Tongues of Fire*, 61.

<sup>316</sup> Prothero, *God Is Not One*, 225.

never disappeared, even though persecuted. Often the African descendants transformed their *orishas*, or deities, and disguised them as Catholic saints, thus helping to preserve their praxis.<sup>317</sup> In doing so Candomble and Umbanda practitioners have actually increased their numbers, and the openness of their formerly clandestine spiritual practices, since religious freedoms increased from the 1950s onward.

Pentecostalism arrived in Brazil in 1910 and worked largely on the margins of Brazilian society until the mid-point of the century when the movement began to flourish. It was initially represented by such classical Pentecostal denominations as the Assemblies of God, which now claims twenty-two million members in Brazil, ten times more adherents than in the United States, the country of origin for the Church.<sup>318</sup> The charismatic wave of Pentecostalism took root quickly in the late 1960s in Brazil, primarily in the Catholic Church, but also, as time went on, in many mainline Protestant denominations. It was, however, in the third wave of the movement, represented by the neo-Pentecostalism of the 1970s, that the Pentecostal groundswell became an even more potent religious force.

The last six decades of religious life in Brazil have seen a radical transformation in the spiritual arena which Andrew Chesnut succinctly summarised in a recent blog. According to his research, Brazil was 99 percent Catholic in 1950, but today it is only 63 percent Catholic. Protestants comprise 22 percent of the population while others, a roughly equal number of secularists and self-identified Afro-Brazilian religionists, comprise the remainder. What is most telling, however, is that 60 percent of all Catholics

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<sup>317</sup> Prothero, *God Is Not One*.

<sup>318</sup> Alice Horn, "A Pentecostal History of Brazil," *World.ag.org World Missions Communications*, March, 2012, <http://world.ag.org/article/pentecostal-history-brazil>.

now claim to be charismatics, and 75 percent of all the evangelicals are Pentecostals.<sup>319</sup> This means that approximately one hundred million of Brazil's nearly two hundred million people are now part of the Pentecostal vanguard. It would be difficult to find a more dramatic illustration of the impact of Pentecostalism in any country in the Global South. It is from within this fusion of Catholicism, Pentecostalism, and Afro-Brazilian religious traditions that the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG) evolved to become the epitome of a neo-Pentecostal denomination.

### **The Roots of the UCKG**

In 1960, Robert McAlister, a Canadian missionary, established the New Life Church in Rio de Janeiro.<sup>320</sup> McAlister came from classical Pentecostal stock, as both his father and great-uncle were pioneers of the movement in Canada and both would eventually lead the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada.<sup>321</sup> His church grew into a small denomination, but it became historically significant because of its innovations and the leaders it spawned. McAlister down-played the “this-worldly asceticism” of classical Pentecostalism, and became an early promoter of the prosperity gospel.<sup>322</sup> He targeted a more middle-class group of congregants and was an early follower of David Du Plessis in the charismatic movement. The New Life Church introduced an episcopal form of church governance which was given legitimacy in 1978 when Pope Paul VI commissioned McAlister and Du Plessis as “bishops of special recognition and rights,”

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<sup>319</sup> R. Andrew Chesnut, “God’s Not Brazilian but the Next Pope Should Be,” *The Blog, Huff Post-Religion*, April 3, 2013, [www.huffingtonpost.com/r-andrew-chesnut/gods-not-brazilian-but-the-next-pope-should-b\\_b\\_2805816.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/r-andrew-chesnut/gods-not-brazilian-but-the-next-pope-should-b_b_2805816.html).

<sup>320</sup> Eric Kramer, “Making global faith universal: Media and a Brazilian prosperity movement,” *Culture and Religion: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 3, no. 1 (2002): 27, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01438300208567181>.

<sup>321</sup> “Historical Perspective of the I.C.C.C.” The International Fellowship of Charismatic Churches, accessed July 5, 2013, <http://www.theiccc.com/aboutUs.html>.

<sup>322</sup> Kramer, “Making global faith universal,” 27.

thus allowing them to claim apostolic succession.<sup>323</sup> McAlister would go on to consecrate others in the charismatic and neo-Pentecostal world, including such prosperity gospel stalwarts as Earl Paulk, John Meares and Benson Idahosa, all in 1982. These four bishops formed the first College of Bishops in the World Communion of Pentecostal Churches which would eventually be known as the International Communion of Charismatic Churches.<sup>324</sup> Paulk, in the United States, and Idahosa, in Nigeria, became significant prosperity gospel luminaries in the decades that followed, but as influential as they were, even they never garnered the power and notoriety of Edir Macedo, who, beginning in his early twenties, would spend a decade in the New Life Church, being mentored by McAlister, before leaving to found his own church, the UCKG.

#### **Edir Macedo (1945—)**

Born in the small coffee town of Rio das Flores, Macedo grew up in a nominally Catholic family, but he rarely went to church. Instead he dabbled with Umbanda as a teenager and young adult before attending the New Life Church.<sup>325</sup> His one notable job before starting his ministry was as a salesman for the Brazilian government lottery.<sup>326</sup> Nothing in his background foreshadowed his ultimate fame, but that all changed at the age of thirty-two, when he experienced a vision in which he claims to have been told by God to create a new church utilizing the name *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* or, in English, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God.<sup>327</sup> Macedo and his brother-in-law,

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<sup>323</sup> “Historical Perspective of the I.C.C.C.”

<sup>324</sup> “Historical Perspective of the I.C.C.C.”

<sup>325</sup> Carlos Ribeiro Caldas, “The Role of the Brazilian Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in the Globalization of Neo-Pentecostalism Today,” *Society for the Scientific Study of Religion* 8, no. 2 (2010): 112.

<sup>326</sup> Caldas, “The Role of the Brazilian Universal Church of the Kingdom of God.”

<sup>327</sup> D.D. Bundy, “Edir Macedo,” *The International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements: Revised and Expanded Edition*, eds. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. Van Der Mass, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002, 2003), 854.

R.R. Soares, launched their church by remodeling a funeral parlor in a poor section of Rio de Janeiro in 1977.<sup>328</sup> The church grew quickly, but the brothers-in-law soon developed theological differences and parted ways, splitting the church. Macedo retained the name of the church, while in 1980 Soares went on to found the International Church of the Grace of God and, ultimately, in his own right, to become an extremely high-profile pastor in Brazil.<sup>329</sup>

### **The Marketing Niches of the UCKG**

Anthropologist Eric Kramer observed that the mention of the word Pentecostalism to most Brazilians conjures up two possible images: “money flowing down to the altar or demons writhing before the congregation.”<sup>330</sup> What the UCKG has been able to do is become the recognized market leader in both of these aspects of neo-Pentecostalism. Historian Andrew Chesnut, who penned an insightful ethnography of members from three Pentecostal denominations in the northeastern Brazilian city of Belem, found that the largest and longest tenured Pentecostal denomination in Brazil, the Assemblies of God, offered a “generic form of faith healing,” while the UCKG “tended to specialize in exorcism, a specific type of faith healing.”<sup>331</sup> Once inside the door of the UCKG, and after all the demons have been exorcised and driven off, believers then discover, according to anthropologist Patricia Birman, “the miracle of prosperity.”<sup>332</sup> Both the exorcism and prosperity aspects of the UCKG praxis deserve further scrutiny, but before

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<sup>328</sup> Caldas, “The Role of the Brazilian Universal Church of the Kingdom of God,” 112.

<sup>329</sup> Caldas, “The Role of the Brazilian Universal Church of the Kingdom of God.”

<sup>330</sup> Eric Kramer, “Spectacle and the Staging of Power in Brazilian Neo-Pentecostalism,” *Latin American Perspectives* 32, no. 1 (2005): 99.

<sup>331</sup> R. Andrew Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits: Latin America's New Religious Economy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 12.

<sup>332</sup> Patricia Birman, “Conversion from Afro-Brazilian Religions to Neo-Pentecostalism: Opening New Horizons of the Possible,” in *Conversion of a Continent: Contemporary Religious Change in Latin America*, eds. Timothy J. Steigenga and Edward L. Cleary (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 127.

exploring those specific subjects it is important to elaborate on the type of congregant that seems to be attracted to the UCKG.

### **The Typical UCKG Congregation in Brazil**

Amongst the scholars who have studied the UCKG there is some debate about the precise socio-economic status of UCKG adherents. But they all agree on one critical point and that is that the majority of practitioners are women. Pentecostalism, like many religious traditions, has more female than male followers. Across Latin America female adherents outnumber men by a ratio of two to one, but within the UCKG that ratio in some congregations can soar as high as four to one.<sup>333</sup> In the UCKG world, both inside and outside of Brazil, Paul Freston observes that most of the congregants are women, between the ages of 30 and 50, who have been “victims of marital infidelity.”<sup>334</sup>

Where there is some controversy about UCKG congregants is precisely where they fit on the socio-economic scale. Freston cites a Rio-based survey that found UCKG congregants to be poorer than those in most Pentecostal churches, as well as less educated, and in his terminology, with fewer “whites” than the general population.<sup>335</sup> On the other hand, Chesnut quotes Freston’s PhD dissertation which claimed that while the UCKG members ranked lower on the socio-economic scale than the Church of the Four Square Gospel, they nonetheless were ranked higher than several other Pentecostal

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<sup>333</sup> Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits*, 43. Chesnut refers specifically to a survey of Rio De Janeiro UCKG churches which recorded a female membership of 81 percent. See page 61.

<sup>334</sup> Paul Freston, “The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God: A Brazilian Church Finds Success in Southern Africa,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 35, no. 1 (2005): 60.

<sup>335</sup> Paul Freston, “The Transnationalisation of Brazilian Pentecostalism: The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God,” in *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America*, eds. Andre Corten and Ruth Marshall-Fratani (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 198.



denominations, including the Assemblies of God, Brazil for Christ, and God Is Love.<sup>336</sup> These rankings held true for the Chesnut ethnography of Pentecostals in Belem.<sup>337</sup> Ari Pedro Oro and Pablo Seman found that in both Argentina and Brazil, the UCKG message was most accepted by “the higher levels of the lower classes and the lower levels of the urban middle classes.”<sup>338</sup> The assertions of Oro and Seman are consistent with most observers of prosperity gospel adherents around the globe, in that while the majority tend to be poor, many have already taken some steps up the socio-economic ladder, and their progress has fueled aspirations for further economic advancement.

### **The War against Afro-Brazilian Religion**

The ubiquitous motto of the UCKG is *Pare de sofrer* or “Stop Suffering.” And from what are people suffering? The answer would be assorted “evils” which in Brazil, according to the UCKG, are the deities and spirits associated with Candomble and Umbanda.<sup>339</sup> From its outset the UCKG went on the offensive against the practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions, accusing them of “making pacts with the devil.”<sup>340</sup> As they grew more zealous and vocal from the pulpit, church pastors encouraged their members to invade and desecrate the *terreiros*, which are the sacred spaces or cult homes of the Afro-Brazilian traditions, and to destroy any sacred images or objects housed there. These attacks were so orchestrated over a number of years in the 1980s that Chesnut terms them a “small-scale holy war against Umbanda and Candomble”<sup>341</sup> As might be expected,

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<sup>336</sup> R. Andrew Chesnut, *Born Again In Brazil: The Pentecostal Boom and the Pathogens of Poverty* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 19.

<sup>337</sup> Chesnut, *Born Again in Brazil*.

<sup>338</sup> Ari Pedro Oro and Pablo Seman, “Brazilian Pentecostalism Crosses National Borders,” in *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America*, eds. Andre Corten and Ruth Marshall-Fratani (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 184.

<sup>339</sup> Oro and Seman, “Brazilian Pentecostalism Crosses National Borders,” 184-85.

<sup>340</sup> Birman, “Conversion from Afro-Brazilian Religions to Neo-Pentecostalism,” 116.

<sup>341</sup> R. Andrew Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits*, 56.

these attacks generated enormous newspaper and television coverage which brought the church almost overnight notoriety.<sup>342</sup>

This demonization of the deities of Candomble and Umbanda, while troublesome to devotees of those religions, struck “a resonant chord in Brazilian popular religiosity,” according to Chesnut.<sup>343</sup> Many of those who had crossed paths with Afro-Brazilian religions,<sup>344</sup> as had denomination-founder Macedo in his youth, were drawn to the UCKG because of its sudden fame, and particularly, if they perceived that they were suffering from malevolent spiritual forces in their personal and business lives. What the UCKG has accomplished in Brazil, according to Birman, is to expose “African Primitivism” as represented by Candomble and Umbanda, and which had been tolerated, or even considered an element, within folk Catholicism “as the major sign of what should be changed in the country and the world.”<sup>345</sup>

Speaking and acting out against Afro-Brazilian religions was the strategy of the church at a macro-level, but at a personal level the UCKG congregant sought relief from suffering through exorcism. Kramer observed several UCKG services in which he witnessed either exorcisms to evict demons from congregants or attempts by pastors through prayer and exhortation to drive off demons that were lurking in the area. He commented that a full-fledged service dealing with exorcism, which happens at least weekly in every UCKG church, is a “spiritual drama” that unfolds in three acts.<sup>346</sup> The opening act sets the “emotional tone” for the drama, which is then followed by an “extended ritual” in which the demonic forces are exposed as “evil” and commanded to

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<sup>342</sup> Birman, “Conversion from Afro-Brazilian Religion to Neo-Pentecostalism,” 116.

<sup>343</sup> Chesnut, *Born Again In Brazil*, 84.

<sup>344</sup> Chesnut, *Born Again in Brazil*, 46. Chesnut reports that most people who attend the UCKG, unlike classical Pentecostals, have had “significant experience” with one of the Afro-Brazilian religions.

<sup>345</sup> Birman, “Conversion from Afro-Brazilian Religion to Neo-Pentecostalism,” 130.

<sup>346</sup> Kramer, “Spectacle and Staging of Power in Brazilian Neo-Pentecostalism,” 109.

“manifest their true identities and intentions.”<sup>347</sup> In the third act, the heroic pastor, through the “word of God,” expels the demons and orders them to leave.<sup>348</sup> Through his fieldwork, Chesnut concluded that UCKG exorcisms were much more elaborate, and their pastors were significantly more assertive in exorcisms, than in those held by pastors of the Assemblies of God. The focus of pastors in the classical Pentecostal church seemed to be just “to keep demons at bay,” rather than confronting them, as did their UCKG counterparts.<sup>349</sup> The end result of the UCKG’s specialization in exorcism and in spiritual warfare against Afro-Brazilian religions is that exorcism became “the key to opening the door to a new religious option for tens of thousands of new members.”<sup>350</sup>

### **The UCKG and the Prosperity Gospel**

Given the prominence attached to exorcism within the UCKG, it might be reasonable to categorize the “deliverance” ministry as the most significant theological element of the church. This would be, however, a gross over-reach. What is surprising and unique about the UCKG is the variety of human and spiritual needs for which the church claims to be able to provide solutions. These needs are reflected in the themes of services which repeat in a weekly cycle, wherever the church is found. Mondays are set aside for financial problems; Tuesdays for health issues; Wednesdays and Sundays are standard worship services which stress personal spiritual development or encounters with the Holy Spirit or God; Thursdays are for family concerns; Fridays are for deliverance from demons; Saturdays are centred on “love therapy,” or finding a mate.<sup>351</sup> Devoting entire days to these niche concerns helps to explain why the church has garnered wide

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<sup>347</sup> Kramer, “Spectacle and Staging of Power in Brazilian Neo-Pentecostalism.”

<sup>348</sup> Kramer, “Spectacle and Staging of Power in Brazilian Neo-Pentecostalism.”

<sup>349</sup> Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits*, 49.

<sup>350</sup> Birman, “Conversion from Afro-Brazilian Religions to Neo-Pentecostalism,” 121.

<sup>351</sup> Freston, “The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God,” 43.

popularity among those seeking spiritual solutions to life's challenges and why it has attracted such a spiritually diverse group of congregants.

The key point about all of these services, however, is that regardless of the particular theme being stressed, offerings are always collected. Chesnut emphasizes that, more than any other Pentecostal church in Latin America, the UCKG is infamous for its extreme measures in collecting offerings.<sup>352</sup> He reports that in most of the typically two-hour services, at least an hour is reserved for preaching about the importance of tithing and for soliciting tithes or special offerings in excess of the tithe.<sup>353</sup> In 1990 a video of Edir Macedo surfaced in which the Bishop instructed his pastors on the image they were to cultivate and project when collecting offerings. He encouraged his pastors to take on the role of “superhero of the people” so that congregants could readily see that the pastor was not simply willing to take on the devil, but in keeping with the prosperity gospel, also sufficiently confident to demand from God the benefits from acting on “the Word.”<sup>354</sup> Claiming rights and promises from God through “positive confession” is a basic tenet of the prosperity gospel, and all practitioners of the theology are encouraged to expect their miracle once they give to God and the church, as represented by their pastor.<sup>355</sup>

What distinguishes the UCKG from other prosperity gospel churches is the degree of theatrical expertise it displays in staging the collection of offerings. Kramer witnessed a prosperity gospel sermon based on the biblical account of King David's triumphant return to Jerusalem with the Ark of the Covenant, complete with a gold-foiled Ark at the

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<sup>352</sup> Chesnut, *Born Again in Brazil*, 59.

<sup>353</sup> Chesnut, *Born Again in Brazil*.

<sup>354</sup> Kramer, “Spectacle and the Staging of Power in Brazilian Neo-Pentecostalism,” 104.

<sup>355</sup> Chesnut postulates that Brazilian Pentecostals through the act of tithing see themselves as “fortifying” their church and in doing so they become a creditor of God. Chesnut, *Born Again in Brazil*, 119.

centre of the church and pastors portraying David and his retinue. The audience was told that the joyful David sacrificed his livestock as a form of thanks to God for the successful return of the Ark. Those in the audience were encouraged to follow the example of King David and significantly sacrifice by giving to the church. After their financial sacrifice they would be provided with a stylized miniature Ark of the Covenant which they could place in their homes, and with it, the presence of God. Then by applying positive confession they were to “challenge” God to follow through with his promise of blessing. The pastor assured the audience that those who followed this course of action by making a substantial sacrifice, would within three months receive many miracles.<sup>356</sup> Accounts of UCKG offerings, like those observed by Kramer, can be found world-wide, wherever the church operates. Perhaps more than any prosperity gospel church, the UCKG brings theatre to the offering collection process and makes it both entertainment and ritual. (Even church buildings can become part of the UCKG theatre. See figure 5.)<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Kramer, “Making global faith universal,” 32-33.

<sup>357</sup> Figure 5. The Catedral Mundial da Fe seats 15,000 worshippers and is currently the largest UCKG church in the world. Seen from above, its shape is said to represent a giant wedding cake. “Catedral mundial da Fe-Rio de Janeiro,” photograph, 2014, <http://noticias.gospelprime.com.br/portal-arca-universal-realiza-fusao-com-iurd-tube/>, (accessed February 3, 2014).



Figure 5: *Catedral Mundial da Fé-Rio de Janeiro.*

### **The Case for Agency**

The pastors of the UCKG communicate urgency and action in fighting evil spirits through the ritual intervention of exorcism, just as they promote action, through giving, to promote health, prosperity and other blessings. But they do not stop here. More than most Pentecostal or neo-Pentecostal churches, they valorize the entrepreneur. This can be demonstrated by the numerous testimonies profiled by the UCKG in their religious broadcasts, which feature ordinary people who, through positive confession, have overcome major obstacles and found business success.<sup>358</sup> As Freston notes, the church counsels congregants to become self-employed, in part so that they can give more freely to the UCKG.<sup>359</sup> So much emphasis is placed on striving for a better life that those

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<sup>358</sup> Kramer, "Spectacle and the Staging of Power in Brazilian Neo-Pentecostalism," 98.

<sup>359</sup> Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics*, 294.

congregants, who according to Oro and Seman are “unconcerned with upward social mobility, will feel out of place in the church.”<sup>360</sup> Obviously few succeed in attaining the heights of those featured in UKCG testimonies, but enough do to ensure that those whose blessings have not yet come can still identify with those who are valorized. Thus inspired, adherents continue to strive for better financial circumstances and in doing so they reject the fatalism and predeterminism offered by much of traditional Christianity.<sup>361</sup>

### **The Business Empire of the UCKG**

Prosperity churches have earned renown throughout the world for their ability to bring in prodigious amounts of money through tithes and special offerings. The UCKG has, however, separated itself from all of its prosperity rivals across the globe with its unique acumen for transforming its cash into business assets, and in due course building a formidable business empire. Beginning in 1984 with the purchase of Radio Copacabana in Rio de Janeiro, the church began acquiring communication assets that would help it to better propagate its prosperity message.<sup>362</sup> In 1989 the church shocked both the Brazilian business and Christian communities by purchasing the debt-ridden Rede Record network of television and radio stations for the price of US \$45 million.<sup>363</sup> Since then, the church media holdings have grown to include two television channels, thirty-nine television stations, thirty radio stations, two national newspapers, and a magazine.<sup>364</sup> Along with its media holdings, the church has also acquired a construction company, a travel agency, a bank, a furniture factory, and a score of other companies, which it runs under a holding

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<sup>360</sup> Ari Pedro Oro and Pablo Seman, “Brazilian Pentecostalism Crosses National Borders,” 192.

<sup>361</sup> Oro and Seman, “Brazilian Pentecostalism Crosses National Borders.”

<sup>362</sup> Alex Cuadros, “Edir Macedo, Brazil’s Billionaire Bishop,” *Bloomberg Businessweek*, April 25, 2013, <http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2013-04-25/edir-macedo-brazils-billionaire-bishop>.

<sup>363</sup> Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits*, 54.

<sup>364</sup> Virginia Garrard-Burnett, “Stop Suffering? The Iglesia Universal del Reino de Dios in the United States,” in *Conversion of a Continent: Contemporary Religious Change in Latin America*, eds. Timothy J. Steigenga and Edward L. Cleary (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 223.

company that manages all of the business operations of the UCKG.<sup>365</sup> The business side of the church has shown no sign of peaking. One academic recently determined that the church is now the “thirty-fourth largest private enterprise in Brazil.”<sup>366</sup>

It would seem that business is good for the UCKG, but it turns out, it has been particularly beneficial for Bishop Macedo and his closest associates, because the above information on church holdings is not technically correct. When Brazil’s tax agency began investigating the Rede Record transaction, it found that the church had not bought the company. It had rather, been purchased by Macedo himself, utilizing interest-free loans that he had acquired from the UCKG.<sup>367</sup> Originally broadcasting regulators had sought to overturn the purchase because Brazil’s constitution prevents religious institutions from owning television or radio stations. The interest-free loans, which Macedo had not declared, led to a decade and a half court case which ultimately, in 2011, was decided in favor of the Bishop. The federal judge who ruled on the case stated that Macedo and his coterie were not acting as front men for the UCKG. Instead he and his associates “control the church absolutely and use it for their own benefit.”<sup>368</sup> That fact may have been distasteful, but it fell outside the boundaries of the case in question and led to Macedo’s exoneration.

Over the years the church and Macedo have had numerous skirmishes with the courts, with the Bishop seemingly always coming out on top. Currently Macedo and three of his top associates are defending themselves in a Sao Paulo court on charges of

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<sup>365</sup> Oro and Seman, “Brazilian Pentecostalism Crosses National Borders,” 183.

<sup>366</sup> Eloy H. Nolivos, “Capitalism and Pentecostalism in Latin America: Trajectories of Prosperity and Development,” in *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socio-Economics of the Global Charismatic Movement*, eds. Katherine Attanasi and Amos Yong (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 105.

<sup>367</sup> Alex Cuadros, “Edir Macedo, Brazil’s Billionaire Bishop.”

<sup>368</sup> Cuadros, “Edir Macedo, Brazil’s Billionaire Bishop.”



“conspiracy, money laundering, and undeclared international cash.”<sup>369</sup> The federal prosecutor leading the case against Macedo and his cronies, Silvio Luis Martins de Oliveira, wrote in his criminal complaint that the UCKG’s promises of prosperity amounts to fraud as the leaders of the church receive far more benefits for their efforts than do any of their followers.<sup>370</sup> The prosecutor observed that it was difficult to draw a line between the church, the media conglomerate, and the other businesses “orbiting” the arms of the church, because all are controlled by Macedo, a fact on which Brazilians, both inside and outside UCKG, would concur.<sup>371</sup> Although the prosecutor has won many other cases involving money laundering, given Macedo’s success in beating a host of other charges, it would seem difficult for the prosecutor to win this case. Political pressure often comes to bear in cases such as this, involving wealthy, high-profile clergymen, and seldom are the preachers the losers, as the US Senate-Grassley investigation of American prosperity ministers demonstrated.<sup>372</sup> And when it comes to political influence, Macedo and the UCKG have built a potent network of relationships that are perhaps even more astonishing than their business holdings.

### **The UCKG as a Political Force**

In 1986, less than a decade after its formation, the UCKG elected its first member to the federal government’s Chamber of Deputies.<sup>373</sup> Since that time its candidates have won seats in increasing numbers at the state and municipal levels as well. For example, in the 2002 elections sixteen members were chosen for the federal congress, nineteen were victorious in various state congresses, and dozens of city councillors won spots across the

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<sup>369</sup>Cuadros, “Edir Macedo, Brazil’s Billionaire Bishop.”

<sup>370</sup>Cuadros, “Edir Macedo, Brazil’s Billionaire Bishop.”

<sup>371</sup>Cuadros, “Edir Macedo, Brazil’s Billionaire Bishop.”

<sup>372</sup> For a synopsis of the Grassley investigation please see Appendix 4.

<sup>373</sup> Ari Pedro Oro, “The politics of the Universal Church and its consequences on religion and politics in Brazil,” *Revista Brasileira de Ciencias Socais* 18, no. 53 (2003): 54.

country.<sup>374</sup> The church has not formed its own political party, but rather it has hand-picked candidates, quite often pastors, who have the backing of Edir Macedo, and it places them within a myriad of minority parties across the political spectrum.<sup>375</sup> By placing its candidates within different small parties the church feels that it achieves better political leverage and bargaining power than by amassing them in one party. This is a strategy that seems to have worked to the benefit of the UCKG in the coalition governments that characterize Brazilian politics.

What initially drove Macedo into politics was his perception that his church required political support, even cover, for the opposition it was receiving to its media empire.<sup>376</sup> While that support is still required, Freston comments that as time has passed the UCKG has engaged in more traditional political manoeuvring, exhibiting what he terms as “ecclesiastical corporatism,” which is nothing more than attempting to “enlist state resources for church aggrandisement.”<sup>377</sup> Since jumping into the political arena the UCKG has played an increasingly prominent, though far from dominant, role in Brazilian political life. Its candidates have backed the coalition governments headed by the left-leaning Workers Party, which elected Lula da Silva as president in 2002 and 2006 and Dilma Rousseff as president in 2010. Its political influence has caused other Pentecostal churches, such as the Assemblies of God and The Church of the Four Square Gospel, to emulate the UCKG’s efforts. Like the UCKG, they have parachuted their own candidates into minority parties, but they have not had the electoral success of the UCKG, because they have been unwilling or unable to create the near bloc voting machine perfected by

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<sup>374</sup> Oro, “The politics of the Universal Church.”

<sup>375</sup> Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics*, 53-54.

<sup>376</sup> Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics*, 17.

<sup>377</sup> Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics*, 285.

Macedo and his political operatives.<sup>378</sup> Perhaps nothing better demonstrated the UCKG's growing political significance than the appointment by President Rouseff of Bishop Marcelo Crivella as her fisheries minister. By training Crivella is a civil engineer, but he has been a UCKG minister for three decades, as well as a major Brazilian recording star, specializing in gospel music. Upon receiving his post Crivella admitted that he knew little about fishing.<sup>379</sup> Perhaps the fact that he is the nephew of Edir Macedo was the most significant criterion in his selection for cabinet.<sup>380</sup>

### **The UCKG and Public Controversy**

By and large the UCKG has had a negative image in Brazil since its inception. One opinion poll taken in 1996 showed that at 17 percent it had the lowest approval rating among the major Brazilian institutions, even lower than Congress.<sup>381</sup> Of course among Protestants the church has a better reputation, but even among this segment of the population it has many foes and critics. The reasons for its negative image are legion, starting with its emphasis on demonizing Afro-Brazilian religions and its aggressive techniques for raising tithes and special offerings. Its public war with Candomble and Umbanda surprised many when it caught the public imagination in the late 1980s, but since it did not impact any dominant sectors of society it received little public condemnation. That all changed, however, on October 12, 1995, when Bishop Sergio Von Helde of the UCKG, in a 6:00 a.m. television show on the church television

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<sup>378</sup> Oro, "The politics of the Universal Church and its consequences on religion and politics in Brazil," 55.

<sup>379</sup> Anthony Boadle, "Evangelical Christians gain political clout in Catholic Brazil," *Reuters US Edition*, June 9, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/06/09/us-brazil-evangelicals-idUSBRE95805120130609>.

<sup>380</sup> Boadles, "Evangelical Christians gain political clout in Catholic Brazil."

<sup>381</sup> Freston, "The Transnationalism of Brazilian Pentecostalism: The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God," 199.

network, deliberately kicked a statue of Brazil's patron saint, Our Lady Aparecida.<sup>382</sup> October 12 is the national holiday of the saint and Van Helde was trying to make the point in his sermon that religious icons, if prayed to, have no power to actually help their petitioners. The initial television show, given its time of airing, did not provoke any outcry, but after the Globo TV network, the country's leading television network and the communications rival of the UCKG's Rede Record network, began broadcasting edited clips of Von Helde's sermon, a national firestorm broke out. Fueled by national and Catholic ire, Von Helde was charged with "vilipending religious symbols and of inciting religious prejudice and discrimination."<sup>383</sup> The case generated enormous publicity and eventually Von Helde was found guilty on both charges, receiving a two-year jail sentence which, on appeal, was reduced to "conditional liberty," because it was his first offence.<sup>384</sup> The event appeared, however, to epitomize the gall of the upstart denomination, and it generated the UCKG seemingly permanent notoriety.

The UCKG has also generated much derision for its many outlandish religious claims, typified by its marketing of "holy oil," which was purportedly to have originated from the Mount of Olives in Israel and which, if applied with faith and prayer, could produce supernatural healing.<sup>385</sup> Subsequent analysis of the oil showed that it was Brazilian soybean oil, but this did little to dampen the enthusiasm of the faithful for the miraculous properties of the oil.<sup>386</sup> On another front of derision, the Globo TV network, which the UCKG characterizes as a mouthpiece for Catholic interests, regularly

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<sup>382</sup>Eric W. Kramer, "Law and the Image of a Nation: Religious Conflict and Religious Freedom in a Brazilian Criminal Case," *Law & Social Inquiry* 26, no. 1 (2001): 43.

<sup>383</sup>Kramer, "Law and the Image of a Nation," 36.

<sup>384</sup>Kramer, "Law and the Image of a Nation."

<sup>385</sup>R. Andrew Chesnut, "Exorcising the Demons of Deprivation: Divine Healing and Conversion in Brazilian Pentecostalism," in *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing*, ed. Candy Gunther Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 180.

<sup>386</sup>Chesnut, "Exorcising the Demons of Deprivation."

lampoons the church. Its most famous effort was a soap opera entitled *Decadence*, a supposedly fictional account of the “ethically dubious rise of a Pentecostal church,” which none-the-less used “verbatim extracts” of interviews given by Edir Macedo.<sup>387</sup>

In the face of a steady stream of opposition, much of it self-inflicted, the church regularly makes claims of “persecution” and asserts that it requires its own media empire and political allies to defend itself against the forces of evil.<sup>388</sup> Freston counters that in the amassing of financial, media, and political assets, the UCKG’s ultimate goal is to create a “substitute national church”<sup>389</sup> which would see it have “hegemony” over the Protestant community in Brazil.<sup>390</sup>

### **The UCKG as a Transnational Religious Force**

In the neo-Pentecostal world, no new denomination has had a greater impact in its country of origin than the UCKG. Within the Global South the UCKG’s significance is equally noteworthy, as no other neo-Pentecostal denomination comes close to the footprint that this Brazilian church has established in the international arena. In 1985, a scant eight years after its formation, the UCKG planted its first church outside of Brazil, in the neighbouring country of Paraguay.<sup>391</sup> By 1995 the UCKG had established more than two hundred churches abroad; by 1998 the number rose to five hundred, and by 2001 over one thousand churches had been founded outside Brazil.<sup>392</sup> Mission planting activity has continued at a rapid pace around the globe, with English language websites of

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<sup>387</sup>Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics*, 46.

<sup>388</sup>Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics*, 54.

<sup>389</sup>Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics*, 58.

<sup>390</sup>Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics*, 44 and 296.

<sup>391</sup>Garrard-Burnett, “Stop Suffering?,” 219.

<sup>392</sup>Garrard-Burnett, “Stop Suffering?”

the UCKG claiming that it has established itself in over two hundred countries.<sup>393</sup> Where it seems to predominate, however, is in Latin America, including the Spanish speaking communities of the United States, and in the Lusophone world. There have also been successes in the English and French speaking countries of sub-Saharan Africa, and among some African diaspora communities of the major cities of North America and Europe. What these figures demonstrate is that the UCKG takes the universal aspect of its name extremely seriously.

### **The UCKG in Latin America**

The UCKG quickly learned that the theological message they delivered in Brazil was not entirely transferable to each country they entered, even those in close proximity in South America. This was dramatically illustrated when the UCKG launched its first churches in Argentina in 1990. In Argentina there is not a strong tradition of Candomble and Umbanda, so it could not continue its war on Afro-Brazilian religions.<sup>394</sup> In fact, it decided that overt attacks on religion would not be a successful tactic in the Argentine religious community. Because there is also not a strong belief in the devil in Argentina, the demonic aspect of the UCKG theology was therefore downplayed and the prosperity gospel message was accentuated. Oro and Seman noted that the UCKG became known as the most prominent exponent of the prosperity message in the religious arena of Argentina.<sup>395</sup> The approach obviously worked, as by 1997 forty-seven churches had been

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<sup>393</sup>The US website of the UCKG claims that the denomination is found in more than 200 countries. See "The Universal Church: Who Are We?" The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, accessed January 8, 2014, <http://universal.org/who-we-are/>.

<sup>394</sup>Oro and Seman, "Brazilian Pentecostalism Crosses National Borders," 185.

<sup>395</sup>Oro and Seman, "Brazilian Pentecostalism Crosses National Borders," 192.

planted,<sup>396</sup> with a recent publication claiming that there are now as many as half a million followers of the UCKG in Argentina.<sup>397</sup>

In the United States, the missionary initiatives of the UCKG have flown largely under the radar of the traditional religious community, because after a brief and unsuccessful attempt to break into the bailiwick of the African-American Church, the denomination has focused its efforts on the Spanish immigrant population of the country.<sup>398</sup> The UCKG opened its first church in the country in 1986, in New York, quickly following the pattern it established in Brazil of first gaining a toehold in major cities before moving on to mid-sized cities.<sup>399</sup> By 2001 the UCKG had opened more than one hundred operations across the country,<sup>400</sup> and a check of its US website shows that it now is located in 161 cities, with many of the mega-cities having a half-dozen or more churches.<sup>401</sup> It broadcasts religious programming extensively on Spanish-speaking television networks, while eschewing any English-speaking television content. With regard to its theology in the United States, exorcism and the prosperity gospel are front and centre, as they are in Brazil, although modified to suit the largely impoverished immigrant weltanschauung. Garrard-Burnett reports that, in services she attended, exorcisms were focused on the demons of unemployment, spirits that made a child join a street gang, and spirits that made spouses addicted to drugs.<sup>402</sup> As for the prosperity gospel emphasis, the UCKG seemed to focus on the liminality of the immigrants, offering up solutions to the modest dreams of the newcomers, such as a new home, or

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<sup>396</sup> Oro and Seman, "Brazilian Pentecostalism Crosses National Borders," 184

<sup>397</sup> Eric Murray, "Thank You for Choosing God, Inc.," *The Argentine Independent*, September 21, 2010, <http://www.argentinaindependent.com/life-style/undergroundba/thank-you-for-choosing-god-inc/>.

<sup>398</sup> Paul Freston, "The Transnationalism of Brazilian Pentecostalism," 202.

<sup>399</sup> Garrard-Burnett, "Stop Suffering?," 219.

<sup>400</sup> Garrard-Burnett, "Stop Suffering?," 120.

<sup>401</sup> "The Universal Church: Locations," <http://universal.org/>.

<sup>402</sup> Garrard-Burnett, "Stop Suffering?," 229.

money to educate a child, provided, as always, that members contributed regularly to the church.<sup>403</sup>

### **The UCKG in the Lusophone World**

The UCKG entered Portugal in 1989 and quickly found that it was not welcomed by the establishment of either the Catholic or Protestant religious communities. Moves such as the formation of an evangelical political party, or the attempt to purchase the historic Coliseu theatre in Oporto for use as a church, were regarded by the establishment as the gambits of an upstart organization.<sup>404</sup> But just as it had demonstrated in Brazil when faced with opposition, the UCKG utilized a combination of persistence, creativity, and financial muscle to overcome the fragmented attacks that it faced. When it was initially blocked from using Portuguese television, the UCKG employed intermediaries to assist in the purchase of financially struggling radio stations.<sup>405</sup> It played up its Brazilian heritage, which, while not necessarily popular with the upper classes, resonated with the lower classes who associate Brazil with world-class football (soccer) and the popular Brazilian soap operas which appear on Portuguese television. Another method that the church used to garner public favor was the establishment of social programs, which included setting up an orphanage, working with drug addicts, and the distribution of food and clothes to the poor.<sup>406</sup>

Through initiatives such as these the UCKG was able to open eighty-five churches in the country by 1998, acquire six radio stations, broadcast programs on

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<sup>403</sup> Garrard-Burnett, "Stop Suffering?," 226.

<sup>404</sup> Freston, "The Transnationalisation of Brazilian Pentecostalism," 205-206.

<sup>405</sup> Freston, "The Transnationalisation of Brazilian Pentecostalism," 205.

<sup>406</sup> Freston, "The Transnationalisation of Brazilian Pentecostalism," 204.



seventeen other radio stations and stage a daily television programme.<sup>407</sup> It used Brazilian pastors to pioneer this missionary activity, but it quickly trained Portuguese ministers to take over the day-to-day church operations in the country. It then cleverly used the Portuguese ministers to help open churches in other parts of Europe, who because they were part of the European Union, had a greater facility than their Brazilian counterparts to travel and work for the UCKG on the continent. By establishing itself in Portugal the UCKG was able to build a beach-head that assisted it in expanding internationally, not only in Europe, but in the Lusophone countries of Africa.

### **The UCKG in sub-Saharan Africa**

The first foray into South Africa by the UCKG was launched in Johannesburg, in 1992, during the last days of apartheid, among Portuguese-speaking migrant workers, who were largely from Mozambique.<sup>408</sup> This initiative was led by a group of ten missionaries, half from Brazil and half from Portugal, who quickly created churches in and around Johannesburg, in locales like Soweto. (For an example of UCKG church planting see figure 6.)<sup>409</sup> In just over a decade, the UCKG opened 187 churches and attracted approximately fifty thousand followers, surpassing its significant efforts in Portugal and making South Africa the most successful country in its missionary outreach.<sup>410</sup> The UCKG has established such a powerful infrastructure in the country that

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<sup>407</sup> Freston, "The Transnationalisation of Brazilian Pentecostalism," 203.

<sup>408</sup> Paul Freston, "The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God: A Brazilian Church Finds Success in Southern Africa," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 35, no. 1 (2005): 48.

<sup>409</sup> Figure 6. The UCKG is a powerful missionary force in the Global South. Bishop Marcelos Pires dedicates a new church in Khayelitsha, Cape Province, the fastest growing township in South Africa. The packed auditorium is comprised overwhelmingly of women, which is consistent with the UCKG membership throughout the world. "Grand Opening of the new UCKG church in Khayelitsha, South Africa," photograph, 2011, <http://www.uckg.org.za/feature/grand-opening-of-the-cenacle-of-the-holy-spirit-in-khayelitsha/>, (accessed February 3, 2014).

<sup>410</sup> Freston, "The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God," 49.

it is now sending black, English-speaking South Africans as missionary ministers throughout sub-Saharan Africa and to England, the United States, and the Caribbean.<sup>411</sup>



**Figure 6: Grand Opening of the new UCKG church in Khayelitsha, South Africa.**

When the fifteen-year civil war that followed Mozambican independence came to a close in 1992, one of the first religious groups to move into the now peaceful country was the UCKG. In the war-torn nation it found a friend in the Marxist-leaning Frelimo government, who saw in the UCKG a wealthy counter-weight to the Catholic Church, which had been aligned with the Portuguese colonialists.<sup>412</sup> The UCKG used its immense financial resources and political influence to buy several radio stations and a television channel, TV Miramar.<sup>413</sup> From 1998 on it was able to broadcast its Brazilian religious programming through TV Miramar, and a station in Angola, to the entire Lusophone community of southern Africa. As it did in Portugal, the UCKG played up its Brazilianness, as well as its cultural, linguistic, and Afro-American ethnic links to the

<sup>411</sup> Freston, "The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God," 50.

<sup>412</sup> Freston, "The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God," 55.

<sup>413</sup> Freston, "The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God," 56.

region, which has endeared it to the indigenous population. And like it did in Portugal, the UCKG also engaged in social work that aided flood victims and gave food to the hungry. The results have been impressive, as by 2011 over two hundred churches had been built throughout the country, with an incredible eighty-five of these located in the capital, Maputo. This means, according to one anthropologist, at least one UCKG church in every neighbourhood of the city.<sup>414</sup>

In Angola, the civil war that followed its independence sputtered on until 2002, thus curtailing some UCKG efforts to missionize the oil-rich country. Nevertheless, in the decade that followed its arrival in Angola in 1992, the UCKG had established 124 churches throughout the country, with forty-seven of them being in Luanda, the capital city where they had attracted more than fifteen thousand members.<sup>415</sup> Despite its impressive growth in Southern Africa, the UCKG seems forever embroiled in controversy. Throughout the month of December 2012, the UCKG widely publicized a year-end event in Luanda which was billed as “The Day of the End-come and put an end to all problems in your life: disease, misery, debt, etc. Bring all your family.”<sup>416</sup> As a result, the UCKG attracted a crowd of more than 152,000 to a stadium that could hold just thirty thousand and despite this case of rampant over-crowding the event went on as scheduled. Not surprisingly a stampede of people occurred in which sixteen attendees were killed and another 120 were injured. The fallout from this event saw the UCKG and

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<sup>414</sup> Linda van de Kamp, “Converting the Spirit Spouse: The Violent Transformation of the Pentecostal Female Body in Maputo, Mozambique,” *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 76, no. 4 (2011): 516.

<sup>415</sup> Freston, “The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God,” 59.

<sup>416</sup> “Government suspends Universal Church,” *Angola Press*, February 3, 2013, [http://www.portalangop.co.ao/angola/en\\_us/noticias/politica/2013/1/5/Government-suspends-Universal-Church,05a2018b-ebaf-4385-83ca-f2bb935a8759.html](http://www.portalangop.co.ao/angola/en_us/noticias/politica/2013/1/5/Government-suspends-Universal-Church,05a2018b-ebaf-4385-83ca-f2bb935a8759.html).

five other Pentecostal churches that practice similar vigils<sup>417</sup> and use, according to the government, “deceitful” publicity, have their licenses to hold services suspended for sixty days.<sup>418</sup> The loss of life was regrettable and tragic. Nonetheless, this incident illustrates the UCKG’s ability to draw huge crowds.

### **The UCKG as a Missionary Force**

Dozens of robust Pentecostal denominations have been founded in the Global South during the last three decades. They have been able to break out of their countries of origin, be they from Nigeria, Brazil, Indonesia or similar countries and establish beachheads in Europe or North America where they minister to the diaspora of their homelands or neighbouring nations. In essence, they have become ethnic churches outside of their countries of origin. The UCKG fits this description in countries like Britain, Sweden, Canada, and, to a certain extent, the United States. Where it differentiates itself from similar denominations, however, has been in its ability to become rooted among the indigenous population of Portugal, most of Latin America and much of Africa.<sup>419</sup> No other Global South Pentecostal denomination has had this degree of success in indigenizing itself in such varied sectors of the globe.

This fact is part of a broader reality which has seen Pentecostalism become a dynamic missionizing force in the Global South during the last few decades, a force that has been “largely independent” from the efforts of churches of North America and Europe.<sup>420</sup> Most of the neo-Pentecostal missionary denominations of the Global South have been quite willing to borrow the prosperity theology of Hagin and Copeland, and to

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<sup>417</sup> “Angola suspends Pentecostal church for 60 days after stampede,” *Reuters*, February 3, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/02/03/us-angola-church-idUSBRE91206E20130203>.

<sup>418</sup> “Government suspends Universal Church,” *Angola Press*, February 3, 2013.

<sup>419</sup> Freston, “The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God,” 40.

<sup>420</sup> Freston, “The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God,” 34.

have their leading luminaries, such as David Yonggi Cho and Benson Idahosa, become part of the international prosperity network spoken of by Coleman. Not so the UCKG, who will sell the books of the American and international prosperity icons, but the denomination's leaders never appear on the same stage as the Pentecostal jet-setters who appear in *Charisma* magazine. The UCKG pastors also never seem to mention these prosperity notables in sermons.<sup>421</sup> Instead, the UCKG promotes a Brazilian version of the prosperity gospel, espoused by its own denominational heavyweights. Their version valorizes "individualized urban lifestyles" and modernity, but is also quite willing to borrow and make extensive use of indigenous symbolic objects, such as holy water and anointing oil, particularly when proselytizing in Africa.<sup>422</sup> It also appears that in recent years the UCKG has decided to focus its denomination building in countries where it has found success, and to fortify its gains by entering what it terms as the "Era of Cathedrals," which is designed to give it more visibility, prominence, and influence.<sup>423</sup> Like Mormon temples, major UCKG edifices are popping up in countries where the UCKG has gained a noticeable profile, all no doubt inspired by the denomination's most extravagant house of worship, the gargantuan reconstruction of the Temple of Solomon nearing completion in Sao Paulo.<sup>424</sup> Clearly the UCKG, with its Brazilian version of the prosperity gospel, has become a major shaper of Pentecostalism and Christianity in the Global South, and the bane of the Catholic Church and many in the Protestant camp.

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<sup>421</sup> Freston, "The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God," 62.

<sup>422</sup> Freston, "The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God."

<sup>423</sup> Freston, "The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God," 63.

<sup>424</sup> See footnote # 764 for additional information on the Temple of Solomon reconstruction.

## Copycats Abound

If the old saying that “imitation is the sincerest form of flattery” is true, then the UCKG should consider itself to be extremely flattered. Brazil, like many countries in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa, is littered with extremely successful prosperity gospel ministers and an even greater number of aspirants, all of whom would like to emulate the success of Edir Macedo and the UCKG. *Forbes* magazine recently published an article on the net worth of the five richest pastors in Brazil, all prosperity gospel advocates. Not surprisingly, Macedo led the pack with an estimated net worth of just under a billion dollars, although many in Brazil think the amount should be much higher.<sup>425</sup> A distant second to Macedo, at \$220 million, was Valdemiro Santiago, who once was a protégée of the Bishop within the UCKG, but who left to found the World Church of the Power of God.<sup>426</sup> Number three on the list, at \$150 million, was Silas Malafaia, at one-time a popular pastor with the Assemblies of God, who left to found the Assembly of God-Victory in Christ denomination.<sup>427</sup> Malafaia called the *Forbes* report “shameless” and threatened to sue the publication because the information was inaccurate. Malafaia claimed that the net worth of his church empire would not reach even half the amount reported by *Forbes*.<sup>428</sup> R.R. Soares, Macedo’s brother-in-law, who left the UCKG to form the International Church of the Grace of God, is listed as having a

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<sup>425</sup> Anderson Antunes, “The Richest Pastors in Brazil,” *Forbes*, January 17, 2013, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/andersonantunes/2013/01/17/the-richest-pastors-in-brazil>.

<sup>426</sup> Antunes, “The Richest Pastors in Brazil.”

<sup>427</sup> Antunes, “The Richest Pastors in Brazil.”

<sup>428</sup> Andrea Madambashi, “Pastor to Sue *Forbes* for Listing ‘Richest Pastors’ in Brazil: Claims Information Wholly Inaccurate,” *Christian Post Latin America*, February 5, 2013, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/pastor-to-sue-forbes-for-listing-richest-pastors-in-brazil-claims-information-wholly-inaccurate-88557/>.

net worth of \$125 million.<sup>429</sup> Rounding out the list is the husband and wife team of Estevam and Sonia Hernandes, who founded the Reborn in Christ Church. Their net worth of \$65 million has not grown at the rate it perhaps could have, because the couple were jailed for a year in 2007, for not declaring more than \$56,000 in cash that they were attempting to illegally bring into the USA through the Miami airport, much of it stuffed between the pages of their Bibles.<sup>430</sup>

In a recent article in *Forbes*, which focused on the controversial purchase of a 49 percent share of Banco Renner, a top fifty bank in Brazil, by Edir Macedo and his wife, reporter Anderson Antunes noted that in the last few years, the UCKG had started to see a drop in its membership in the country.<sup>431</sup> The membership decline has had nothing to do with any turning away from the “prosperity theology,” but rather, many UCKG members have left the church to join other “Universal-like denominations” who espouse the same theology.<sup>432</sup> Macedo’s chief rival is Valdemiro Santaigo of the World Church, and both have taken to the airwaves to denounce the other in a fierce “war of the pastors.”<sup>433</sup> In a television show on his network Macedo staged an interview with the devil, who supposedly admitted that he had installed himself in Santiago’s church.<sup>434</sup> Needless to say, such television programming makes for compelling viewing for both adherents of the prosperity gospel and bemused skeptics.

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<sup>429</sup> Anderson Antunes, “The Richest Pastors in Brazil,” January 17, 2013, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/andersonantunes/2013/01/17/the-richest-pastors-in-brazil/>.

<sup>430</sup> Antunes, “The Richest Pastors in Brazil.”

<sup>431</sup> Anderson Antunes, “Brazilian Billionaire Bishop Edir Macedo Is Now A Banker, Too,” *Forbes*, July 22, 2013, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/andersonantunes/2013/07/22/brazilian-billionaire-bishop-edir-macedo-is-now-a-banker-too/>.

<sup>432</sup> Antunes, “Brazilian Billionaire Bishop Edir Macedo Is Now A Banker, Too.”

<sup>433</sup> Leonardo Coutinho, “The Devil enters the fray between Macedo and Valdemiro,” *Veja*, March 24, 2012, <http://translate.google.ca/translate?hl=en&sl=pt&u=http://veja.abril.com.br/noticia/brasil/o-diabo-entra-na-briga-entre-edir-macedo-e-valdemiro&prev=/search?q%3D>.

<sup>434</sup> Coutinho, “The Devil enters the fray between Macedo and Valdemiro.”

## GUATEMALA

Just as the prosperity gospel in Brazil is not limited to the UCKG, it follows that the doctrine is not limited to Brazil or Brazilian denominations, but rather it is ubiquitous throughout Latin America. One smaller country that deserves mention in this thesis is Guatemala, because of its long association with classical Pentecostalism<sup>435</sup> and which now has a population that is 60 percent Pentecostal or charismatic Catholic.<sup>436</sup> (The Pentecostal influence is so strong in Guatemala that two Pentecostals have served terms as president of the country.)<sup>437</sup> There are also a plethora of prosperity gospel churches in the country, many with modern megachurches serving as the flag-ships for their respective denominations.<sup>438</sup> Space limitations will allow for but a brief examination of two of these new prosperity gospel denominations.

The first of these is the El Shaddai ministries founded in 1983 by Dr. Harold Caballeros, a lawyer, politician, and theologian.<sup>439</sup> Caballeros has deep prosperity gospel roots, having been ordained a pastor by T. L. Osborne in John Osteen's Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas, in 1982.<sup>440</sup> Operating from Guatemala City, El Shaddai (not to be confused with the similarly named, but unconnected, prosperity gospel organization

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<sup>435</sup> No academic has done more to publicize the classical Pentecostal influence Guatemala than Peter L. Berger. See Peter L. Berger, "MAX WEBER IS ALIVE AND WELL, AND LIVING IN GUATEMALA: THE PROTESTANT ETHIC TODAY," *Review of Faith & International Affairs* 8, no. 4 (2010): 3-9.

<sup>436</sup> Kevin Lewis O'Neill, *City of God: Christian Citizenship in Postwar Guatemala* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 11.

<sup>437</sup> The two Pentecostal Presidents of Guatemala were Rios Montt (1982-84) and Jorge Serrano (1991-93). Serrano was in fact, a member of the El Shaddai denomination founded by Harold Caballeros, the subject of this section of this thesis. See Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America*, 266.

<sup>438</sup> In addition to the two Guatemalan denominations examined in this thesis, Freston noted in his 2001 study that Mision de Fe, Fraternidad Cristiana de Guatemala, Jesus es Senor, La Familia de Dios, and Lluvias de Gracia were noteworthy denominations of the prosperity genre. See Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics*, 266.

<sup>439</sup> Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics*, xix.

<sup>440</sup> Dennis A. Smith and Leonido Silveira Campos, "Christianity and Television in Guatemala and Brazil: The Pentecostal Experience," *Studies in World Christianity* 11, no. 1 (2005): 52.



in the Philippines) has grown into what University of Toronto cultural anthropologist Kevin O’Neill terms a “multi-national neo-Pentecostal empire.”<sup>441</sup> The denomination has twelve thousand members who attend services in Guatemala City, but in addition, there are more than eighty satellite churches across the nation.<sup>442</sup> As well, there are El Shaddai churches and an electronic ministry of internet, radio and television broadcasting which serve the Guatemalan diaspora religious communities in the United States, Canada, Mexico, El Salvador, Aruba, Peru, Spain and Portugal.<sup>443</sup> O’Neill stresses that El Shaddai was not formed to minister to the poor, but rather to the upper class, non-indigenous population of the country, although it has increasingly targeted the less privileged as the denomination has expanded.<sup>444</sup> As in most Pentecostal churches, women outnumber men, and they are extremely active in the El Shaddai’s volunteer activities,<sup>445</sup> the most important of which is leading the more than five hundred church cells which meet weekly in Guatemala City. These cell groups permeate the El Shaddai denomination in Guatemala and abroad, and they are directly modeled after the prototype church cell movement founded by David Yonggi Cho at his Yoido Full Gospel Church in Korea.<sup>446</sup> This is no accident. Caballeros has cultivated a significant relationship with Cho’s church which has seen many Yoido ministry teams visit El Shaddai in Guatemala, including some led by Cho himself.<sup>447</sup>

Caballeros has moved beyond entrepreneurial church leadership to another form of power. He leveraged his high profile as a pastor to run for the Presidency of

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<sup>441</sup> O’Neill, *City of God*, xix.

<sup>442</sup> O’Neill, *City of God*, xviii.

<sup>443</sup> O’Neill, *City of God*, 173.

<sup>444</sup> O’Neill, *City of God*, xviii-xix.

<sup>445</sup> O’Neill, *City of God*, 137.

<sup>446</sup> O’Neill, *City of God*, 26.

<sup>447</sup> O’Neill, *City of God*.

Guatemala in 2007, and although he did not win, he significantly raised his political stature.<sup>448</sup> This move ultimately led to his appointment as Guatemala’s Foreign Minister, (see figure 7)<sup>449</sup> a capacity he served in for one year from 2012 to 2013.<sup>450</sup> Regarding El Shaddai’s place within the Christian community of the nation, O’Neill referred to the Guatemala City megachurch (where he conducted the bulk of his research) as possessing an “unflinching commitment to upward mobility and naked prosperity.”<sup>451</sup>



**Figure 7: Secretary Clinton meets with Guatemalan Foreign Minister Harold Caballeros.**

Another prosperity gospel star in Guatemala is the rather appropriately named, Cash Luna, who in 1994 founded the Casa De Dios (House of God) ministry in the capital city.<sup>452</sup> In addition to his church, which has 25,000 members, Luna has become a

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<sup>448</sup> O’Neill, *City of God*, xix.

<sup>449</sup>Figure 7. “Secretary Clinton meets with Guatemalan Foreign Minister Harold Caballeros,” photograph, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/pix/2012/02/184308.htm>, (accessed February 3, 2014).

<sup>450</sup> “New Guatemalan Foreign Minister appointed,” January 10, 2013, <http://edition.channel5belize.com/archives/80571>.

<sup>451</sup> O’Neill, *City of God*, 192-193.

<sup>452</sup> Sergio Chapa, “Televangelist Cash Luna expected to draw thousands in Hidalgo,” *ValleyCentral.com.*, November 27, 2012, <http://www.valleycentral.com/news/story.aspx?id=830447#.UpJ2iSelrg0>.

well-known televangelist throughout Latin America.<sup>453</sup> Luna targets young urban professionals on his television broadcasts and has developed a style similar to Benny Hinn in that, like Hinn, people who are “touched” by Luna on stage collapse to the floor.<sup>454</sup> He is regularly seen on the Trinity Broadcasting Network,<sup>455</sup> earning fame that has apparently garnered him more than one million fans on his Facebook page.<sup>456</sup> At his 2012 evangelistic campaign that took place on the Texas side of the Rio Grande in Hidalgo, more than five hundred buses brought devotees from Mexico co-mingled with his followers from US Latino communities.<sup>457</sup> The highlight of the three-day conference was a Saturday morning seminar filled with prosperity gospel and positive thinking rhetoric entitled “Supera Tus Limites” or “Exceed Your Limits.”

Not to be outdone by Caballeros and El Shaddai, Luna launched a new, ultra-modern, high-tech, megachurch in Guatemala City in 2013, (see figure 8)<sup>458</sup> at which the President of Guatemala, Otto Perez Molina, was a guest speaker.<sup>459</sup> The first-ever Olympic medalist from Guatemala, Erick Barrondo, carried the national flag into the over-flowing, eleven-thousand-seat auditorium as the opening ceremony began amidst

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<sup>453</sup>Smith and Silveira Campos, “Christianity and Television in Guatemala and Brazil,” 54.

<sup>454</sup> Smith and Silveira Campos, “Christianity and Television in Guatemala and Brazil.”

<sup>455</sup> The Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), based in Costa Mesa, California, was founded in 1973 by Paul and Jan Crouch and Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker. Now controlled by the Crouch family, it is the largest religious television network in the world and is renowned for its prosperity gospel programming. For an intriguing look at the link between the TBN and the growth of the prosperity gospel in the United States see Kathleen Hladky, “I Double-Dog Dare you in Jesus’ Name! Claiming Christian Wealth and the American Prosperity Gospel,” *Religion Compass* 6, no. 1 (2012): 82-96.

<sup>456</sup> Chapa, “Televangelist Cash Luna expected to draw thousands in Hidalgo.”

<sup>457</sup> Chapa, “Televangelist Cash Luna expected to draw thousands in Hidalgo.”

<sup>458</sup> “Casa de Dios-Guatemala City,” photograph, 2013, <http://apologista.wordpress.com/2013/04/29/64266/>, (accessed February 3, 2014).

<sup>459</sup> Figure 8. “Cash Luna opens megatemplo House of God in Guatemala,” *AcontecerCristiano.net*, April 29, 2013, <http://translate.google.ca/translate?hl=en&sl=es&u=http://www.acontecercristiano.net/2013/04/cash-luna-inaugura-megatemplo-casa-de.html&prev=/search?q%3Dcas>.

anthems and hymns that stoked both Pentecostal and patriotic fervor.<sup>460</sup> As both Calballeros and Luna have demonstrated, dynamic Pentecostal growth and the prosperity gospel are thriving in Guatemala.



**Figure 8:** *Casa de Dios-Guatemala City. The new megachurch of Cash Luna.*

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<sup>460</sup> “Cash Luna opens megatemplo House of God in Guatemala.”

## CHAPTER FOUR

### AFRICA

#### **The Religious Landscape of Africa Prior to the Arrival of Pentecostalism**

Prior to the nineteenth century the religious milieu of Africa would have been relatively easy to describe in geographic terms. North of the tenth parallel of latitude North, the territory was almost exclusively Muslim. South of this demarcation line indigenous African religions prevailed. There were some anomalies with this distribution, such as scattered pockets of Islam along the east coast of Africa in modern day Kenya and Tanzania, or the Coptic Christians of Egypt and Ethiopia, but for the most part this generalization held true. This status quo had been in place for nearly a millennium, but all this changed at the Congress of Berlin in 1884-85. Here the major powers of Europe convened to formalize the boundaries of the parts of Africa they wanted to control as colonies.<sup>461</sup> The British, the French, the Germans, the Portuguese, and the Belgians carved out their spheres of influence in the south, while the Turks, British, Spanish, and French did the same in North Africa, in their so-called “Scramble for Africa.”<sup>462</sup> With the colonial borders now legitimized in the eyes of the Europeans, the imperial powers sent contingents of soldiers, bureaucrats, and their fellow travellers, Christian missionaries from the historic mission churches, to strengthen their hold on their newest territories south of the tenth parallel of latitude North. Wherever Islam predominated, however, western powers, particularly the British, sent in their soldiers and

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<sup>461</sup> Arthur N. Cook, *Africa: Past And Present* (Totowa, NJ: Littlefield, Adam & CO., 1969), 54.

<sup>462</sup> Cook, *Africa*, 53.

bureaucrats, but, assiduously attempted to keep their missionaries out and govern by the indirect rule of traditional Islamic leaders.<sup>463</sup>

Even before this “scramble” of the late nineteenth century, however, some intrepid Christian missionary organizations, such as the Church Missionary Society (Anglican), the Basel Society (Lutheran and Calvinist), and the Methodist Missionary Society had launched forays into the continent, primarily in West and South Africa.<sup>464</sup> Portuguese priests had long been active in the colonies of Angola and Mozambique, but they were the only Catholic missionaries in the continent until the Society of Our Lady of Africa was launched in 1868. Better known as the White Fathers, these white-robed priests carried out mission activity in many parts of West and Central Africa.<sup>465</sup> After the Berlin conference, these missionary groups were joined by dozens of other historic mission church organizations who came to sub-Saharan Africa to plant churches, schools, and hospitals and do what they could to carry out the lofty and somewhat sanctimonious goal of the conference “to protect the natives in their moral and material well-being.”<sup>466</sup> Clearly, imperialism and missionary zeal dove-tailed with the social Darwinism of the day, and by the dawn of the twentieth century western Europeans were firmly entrenched as the new power and cultural brokers of Africa south of the Sahara.

### **Pentecostalism Arrives**

Mere months after the Azusa Street revival broke out in Los Angeles, Pentecostal missionaries began appearing in Africa. In West Africa, Lucy Farrow, an African-American who participated at Azusa Street, arrived in Liberia in 1907, and not long after

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<sup>463</sup> Eliza Griswold, *The Tenth Parallel: Dispatches From The Fault Line Between Christianity And Islam* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 24.

<sup>464</sup> Cook, *Africa*, 45.

<sup>465</sup> Cook, *Africa*.

<sup>466</sup> Cook, *Africa*, 54.

missionaries came ashore in neighbouring Sierra Leone.<sup>467</sup> John G. Lake, a wealthy Chicago businessman, who had been affiliated with Alexander Dowie's Zion City healing ministry and who was a visitor to Azusa Street, led a team of Pentecostals to South Africa in 1908.<sup>468</sup> Lake remained in South Africa for five years and helped spread Pentecostalism, through his African followers, to neighbouring British colonies. The first issue of the *Canadian Pentecostal Testimony*, the monthly magazine of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, reports that Mr. and Mrs. Joseph K. Blakney, missionaries serving in the Belgian Congo, were home on leave.<sup>469</sup> These scattered references to early western missionary activity illustrate the fact that soon after the Azusa Street revival, Pentecostal missionaries, often untrained and poorly financed, began showing up throughout sub-Saharan Africa, preaching the new theology. The paths they followed were usually not new, as they had been originally blazed by missionaries from the historic mission churches such as the Methodists in Southern Africa.<sup>470</sup> What needs to be emphasized, however, is that the spread of Pentecostalism would not have occurred if it had not been picked up and transmitted by Africans who spoke the vernacular languages, were identified with the local culture, and who knew the terrain. David Martin illustrates this point with his reference to the evangelizing prowess of some Sierra Leonean Pentecostals who had carried the message a considerable distance from the British colony, as far

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<sup>467</sup> Allan Anderson, *An Introduction To Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 115.

<sup>468</sup> David Maxwell, *African Gifts of the Spirit: Pentecostalism & the Rise of a Zimbabwean Transnational Movement* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006), 38.

<sup>469</sup> *Canadian Pentecostal Testimony*, December, 1920, 2. The *Canadian Pentecostal Testimony* began publication in 1920 with R.E. McAlister as editor. In 1927 it became the *Pentecostal Testimony*. McAlister remained the editor for twenty years, while serving concurrently most of those years, as the General Superintendent of the newly formed Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC). R.E. McAlister's great nephew, Robert McAlister, the son of Walter McAlister, a pioneer evangelist and later the General Superintendent for the denomination, became an early champion of the prosperity gospel in Brazil. Robert founded the New Life Church in Rio de Janeiro which spawned Edir Macedo and the UCKG. For additional information on the early days of the PAOC see the *Canadian Pentecostal Testimony*.

<sup>470</sup> Maxwell, *African Gifts of the Spirit*, 44.

inland as the French colony of Upper Volta, now Burkina Faso, by 1921.<sup>471</sup> Pentecostalism continued to grow in sub-Saharan Africa between the war years and after WWII, but it was a barely noticeable religious movement, just as it was everywhere else in the world at this time, always remaining in the shadow of the better-financed historic mission churches. Its major accomplishment during the first six decades of its existence in Africa was that it planted significant roots, primarily in the English-speaking colonies of Great Britain. These roots in the form of churches, Bible Schools, and primary and secondary schools, in colonies as diverse as Kenya, Nigeria, and Rhodesia, would prove to be significant when Pentecostalism began its surge during the last four decades.

### **The African Response to the Historic Mission Churches**

Many Africans readily took to the proselytizing efforts of the historic mission churches, but once inside these western denominations a large segment of the converts found themselves resisting some doctrines that seemed alien. They also chafed at church bureaucracies that seemed to limit the roles and upward mobility of indigenous people. As a result, across sub-Saharan Africa, a plethora of African Independent Churches (AICs) emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. They adopted many aspects of Christianity, but they also retained strong local connections and idioms. The first of these were reflected in the movement characterized as Ethiopianism, which began in South Africa in 1892 when Mangena Mokone left his Methodist Church and founded the Ethiopian Church in Pretoria.<sup>472</sup> Mokone, and those who emulated him saw in the ancient but independent Christian kingdom of Ethiopia, a model for African religious and political power.

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<sup>471</sup> David Martin, *Pentecostalism*, 148.

<sup>472</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 61.



Another AIC variant was the prophetic movement which sprung up across Africa south of the Sahara. Like the prophets of the Bible, these usually marginal members of society received what they believed to be a call from God to go out and proclaim a new message. Most had small followings, but a few cut a large swath. One such figure was Wade Harris (1865-1929), a Liberian who believed he received his mandate from the Archangel Gabriel.<sup>473</sup> Dressed in a long white robe with matching turban, and carrying a walking stick, cross, and calabash, Harris looked like a holy man, albeit a holy man who travelled with a small retinue of wives.<sup>474</sup> Harris spent several years before WWI walking through West Africa in today's Liberia, Ivory Coast, and Ghana, converting Africans to his form of Christianity which, unlike the historic mission churches, not only recognized witchcraft, but set out to destroy it. He also praised western education and hygiene, but he endorsed several African institutions such as polygamy, which was anathema to the historic mission churches. Generally Harris asked his converts to join the historic mission churches, but a large contingent of his followers in the Ivory Coast formed the independent Harrist Church, a denomination that has grown to over 200,000 followers today.<sup>475</sup>

There is another group of AICs which Ogbu Kalu terms as *Abaroho* in East Africa, *Zionists* in South Africa and *Aladura* in West Africa.<sup>476</sup> The founders of church denominations in this movement, unlike the prophets, did not receive a divine call to create a ministry. Nonetheless, they broke away from the mainline churches during the early twentieth century to offer their followers a more Pentecostal form of worship.

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<sup>473</sup> Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 37.

<sup>474</sup> Mathew Kustenbauder, "Prophetic Movements: Western Africa," in *New Encyclopedia of Africa*, 4, eds. John Middleton and Joseph C. Miller (Detroit: Thomson/Gale, 2008), 3.

<sup>475</sup> Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 116.

<sup>476</sup> Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 66.

Central to these churches were prayers for the sick and ecstatic worship, along with the appropriation of several African religious worship rituals. What is significant for this study is that from this segment of the AICs came many of the leaders of the Pentecostal movement which emerged across Africa a half-century later. Nowhere is this more significant than in Nigeria where the *Aladura* churches created a seedbed for Pentecostalism, and eventually the prosperity gospel.

## NIGERIA

If Brazil is the most important country in Latin America, based on the extent of its population, economic influence, and cultural impact, then Nigeria occupies the same position in Africa.<sup>477</sup> With regard to the role of religion, Nigeria, in many ways, is a representative model of the continent. Just as Africa has a Muslim north and an indigenous religious south that has converted to Christianity, so too does Nigeria. In fact, the celebrated tenth parallel of latitude North that divides the Muslim north of Africa from its Christian south was first noticed in Nigeria, where it performs this function with amazing accuracy. But it wasn't always this way.

Perhaps more than any academic writing about Christianity in the Global South, Philip Jenkins uses demography to buttress his argument that this part of the world is becoming the new centre of Christendom. His insights on Nigeria are most illuminating. Jenkins illustrates that at the beginning of the twentieth century Nigeria's population of sixteen million was comprised of four million Muslims (who made up 26 percent of the population), two hundred thousand Christians (who represented just 1 percent of the population), and twelve million animists (who, at 73 percent of the colony, dominated Nigeria). By the year 2000 there were forty-nine million Muslims (who comprised 44 percent of the population), fifty-one million Christians (who represented 46 percent of the country), and eleven million animists (who made up 10 percent of Nigeria).<sup>478</sup> It would be challenging to find a more striking example of religious change in one country in such a short period of time. With regard to the huge increase in Christians, Jenkins points out that in the year 2000 the two largest denominations, the Anglicans (nineteen million) and

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<sup>478</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 195.

the Catholics (fourteen million) represented almost two thirds of Nigeria's Christians.<sup>479</sup> What Jenkins did not mention, however, is that the other third of Nigerian Christians were almost all classical Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal adherents whose numbers have been swelling since the 1970s. Nor does Jenkins comment on the dramatic increase of charismatic Pentecostals among Catholic and Anglican believers in Nigeria and throughout Africa. In fact, in a recent article in the *Journal of Anglican Studies*, an Anglican academic laments the fact that most of the Anglican Church in Nigeria has become Pentecostal or charismatic, a condition he labels as "Anglocostalism," replete with "signs and wonders" and even the prosperity gospel.<sup>480</sup>

### **The Surge of Pentecostalism in Nigeria**

David Martin, the most prolific academic writer on the global phenomenon of Pentecostal expansion, observed that while Pentecostalism had arrived in Africa in the early part of the twentieth century, "its massive expansion came in the seventies, a decade or so later than in Latin America."<sup>481</sup> The first stirrings of Pentecostal growth in Nigeria, according to Kalu, can be seen among university students who, in the chaotic aftermath of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war, joined interdenominational Bible Study groups, such as Scripture Union in southeastern Nigeria, the heartland of the Igbo, and the Christian Union movement in southwestern Nigeria, where the Yoruba tribe predominate.<sup>482</sup> These groups had a puritanical and holiness emphasis which quickly evolved into a charismatic style of worship. These students received a mixed response when they attempted to bring their new form of worship into their home congregations in the historic mission churches.

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<sup>479</sup> Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*.

<sup>480</sup> Jesse Zink, "Anglocostalism in Nigeria: Neo-Pentecostalism and Obstacles to Anglican Unity," *Journal of Anglican Studies* 10, no. 2 (2012): 231.

<sup>481</sup> Martin, *Pentecostalism*, 98.

<sup>482</sup> Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 89 and 98.

Those who felt ostracized soon left for churches more accepting of charismatic worship, and they became the harbingers of a wave of teenagers and young adults who, over the next few decades, spurred the growth of Pentecostalism in Nigeria and across sub-Saharan Africa. The individual who became most identified with this movement was a young firebrand preacher, Benson Idahosa, who would go on to become the father of the prosperity gospel in Africa.

### **Benson Idahosa (1938–1998)**

The life of Benson Idahosa was a “classic rags-to-riches tale.”<sup>483</sup> He led a life of privation as a child, even though he “descended from an important line of Edo chiefs.”<sup>484</sup> After high school he began working as a salesman for the Canadian company, Bata Shoes, where he eventually carved out a successful career as a sales manager.<sup>485</sup> He became a born again Christian in 1959 and embarked almost immediately on what he felt was a calling to be a lay minister with the Assemblies of God. Here he remained until 1968, when he created his own small ministry.<sup>486</sup> In 1971 Idahosa’s life changed dramatically after meeting American evangelist, Gordon Lindsay, who was conducting a revival crusade in Nigeria. Lindsay, whose classical Pentecostal roots include ties to such luminaries as Dowie, Parham, Lake, and Branham, was so impressed with Idahosa that he offered him a two-year scholarship to his seminary, the Christ For All Nations Bible College in Dallas, Texas.<sup>487</sup> It was here that Idahosa encountered the early manifestations of the prosperity gospel, which philosophically fit his entrepreneurial nature. He often

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<sup>483</sup> Ruth Marshall, *Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009), 298.

<sup>484</sup> Andrew P. Lyons and Harriet D. Lyons, “Magical Medicine on Television: Benin City, Nigeria,” *Journal of Ritual Studies* 1, no.1 (1987): 113.

<sup>485</sup> Lyons and Lyons, “Magical Medicine on Television.”

<sup>486</sup> Ruth Marshall, *Political Spiritualities*, 298.

<sup>487</sup> Marshall, *Political Spiritualities*.

preached on weekends in local churches, and as a result he began networking with many of the leading lights of American Pentecostalism. Maxwell points out that Idahosa made a most positive impression on his Bible School teachers, something that the shy, less dynamic, Ezekiel Guti, who attended the seminary at the same time, was unable to do.<sup>488</sup> Idahosa became so empowered with his newfound theological knowledge that he returned home before his course was completed to devote himself full-time to evangelizing in Nigeria in earnest. Over the next twenty-six years Idahosa would change the face of Pentecostalism and, for that matter, Christianity, not just in Nigeria, but throughout sub-Saharan Africa.

Using his Church of God Mission headquarters in Benin City as his base, Idahosa began this new phase of his ministry by aggressively planting satellite churches in adjacent towns in Edo state.<sup>489</sup> Fifteen years later he was heading a ministry that had thirty-one churches in Benin City alone, and more than one thousand across Nigeria, with additional churches in other countries of the continent.<sup>490</sup> By any measure, in any religious tradition, these are impressive gains. No longer selling shoes, Idahosa's new growth product was a Nigerian theological interpretation of the prosperity gospel.

### **The Theology of Benson Idahosa**

There are three elements that should be considered when providing a synopsis of Idahosa's theology. To start with, Idahosa grew up in an African milieu where belief in witchcraft, sorcery, and the power of both positive and malevolent forces was pervasive,

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<sup>488</sup> Maxwell, *African Gifts of the Spirit*, 90. Shyness aside, Guti would return to his home in Zimbabwe to found and lead the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA), the largest Pentecostal church in that country.

<sup>489</sup> Idahosa's early expansion of his ministry was aided by the addition of a large group of charismatic Anglicans who had been excommunicated from the Benin Diocese of the Anglican Church. See Mathews Ojo, *The End-Time Army: Charismatic Movements in Modern Nigeria* (Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc., 2006), 76.

<sup>490</sup> Lyons and Lyons, "Magical medicine on television." 111.

and remains so today.<sup>491</sup> When Idahosa converted to the Christianity of the Assemblies of God and obtained his second theological strand, he never left the African world of spirits; he simply learned to confront it from a classical Pentecostal perspective. As a Pentecostal lay pastor filled with the Holy Ghost, he had the “authority” to heal the sick, cast out demons, and receive visions and prophecy which became the basis of his ministry. In his new role, Bible in hand, Idahosa had the power to ward off and fight evil, and according to History of Religions Professor Klaus Hock, this gave him the tools to deal with one of the most embedded desires in the African world view, that being an “anxiety to eliminate evil.”<sup>492</sup>

It is important to remember that as a classical Pentecostal lay minister, Idahosa fought the world of amulets, fetishes, and traditional African religion for more than a decade before he went to Bible School in the USA. It was there that Idahosa encountered the prosperity gospel, the third element in his theological framework. He was a natural entrepreneur, and so the prosperity gospel suited his temperament. More significantly, it also fit with a traditional African perception that “wealth and success are regarded as a result of God’s blessing.”<sup>493</sup> Simply put, the prosperity gospel became another tool in Idahosa’s arsenal to promote the goodness of God and to fight against the evil of the devil and his minions, best exemplified in the evil of African poverty.

What Idahosa did when he returned to Nigeria was preach against the forces of evil that he saw permeating his country. He spoke out against corruption, greed, lack of faith, and above all else, individual sin. After watching and listening to hundreds of his

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<sup>491</sup> Lyons and Lyons, “Magical medicine on television,” 107.

<sup>492</sup> Klaus Hock, “Jesus Power-Super Power!: On the Interface between Christian Fundamentalism and New Religious Movements in Africa,” *Mission Studies* 12, no. 1 (1995), 62-63.

<sup>493</sup> Hock, “Jesus Power-Super Power!,” 59.

sermons, Andrew and Harriet Lyons concluded his theology was not simply a transplanted version of American Pentecostalism; instead it “contained firm roots in the healing cults of traditional Africa and an indigenous Christian tradition (the AICs) which itself owes much to West African religious praxis.”<sup>494</sup> His success, they commented, was because he was “representative of the contemporary Nigerian zeitgeist.”<sup>495</sup> Their research, which consisted of interviewing 350 residents of Benin City, showed that Idahosa’s preaching “greatly moves his audience,”<sup>496</sup> and that his message is perceived as African, not foreign.<sup>497</sup> Reinforcing the enduring legacy of the traditional African world view, even those who heard Idahosa preach and did not convert to his brand of Christianity were convinced that he possessed “mystical power.”<sup>498</sup> Today thousands of pastors across sub-Saharan Africa proclaim the same message as Idahosa. He earns his place in history, however, not just because he was the first African to articulate the message, but because of how he took this theology to the masses.

### **Television Pioneer and Religious Entrepreneur**

There were few television sets in Nigeria in 1974, when Benson Idahosa inaugurated a weekly broadcast entitled “Redemption Hour” on a local outlet of the National Television Authority of Nigeria, in Benin City.<sup>499</sup> Within a decade, however, in Idahosa’s home town of Benin City, 80 percent of households had a television, as was the case in most of the major cities of the country.<sup>500</sup> During that time Idahosa’s “Redemption Hour” became a popular program across the nation. What television

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<sup>494</sup> Lyons and Lyons, “Magical Medicine on television,” 104.

<sup>495</sup> Lyons and Lyons, “Magical Medicine on television,” 112.

<sup>496</sup> Lyons and Lyons, “Magical Medicine on television,” 116.

<sup>497</sup> Lyons and Lyons, “Magical Medicine on television,” 125.

<sup>498</sup> Lyons and Lyons, “Magical Medicine on television.”

<sup>499</sup> Lyons and Lyons, “Magical Medicine on television.” 115.

<sup>500</sup> Lyons and Lyons, “Magical Medicine on television,” 109.



viewers in Nigeria were able to watch was the emergence of the first African Pentecostal conglomerate, which the founder labeled the Idahosa World Outreach, a title befitting the global aspirations of its prime mover.<sup>501</sup> The centre piece of this ministry was a new, ten-thousand-seat church auditorium, built in 1975, and known as the “Miracle Centre,” from which Idahosa filmed his television sermons.<sup>502</sup> The “Miracle Centre” was Africa’s first megachurch, and its appearance astounded Pentecostal believers, the historic mission churches, and eventually, the Muslim community of Nigeria. Also appearing in that same year was Idahosa’s seminary, the All Nations for Christ Bible Institute, a name which closely resembled his alma mater in Dallas.<sup>503</sup> This was no ordinary Bible School, as it quickly became the major dissemination point for the prosperity gospel throughout Africa. While primarily catering to Nigerians, Idahosa also gave scholarships to young Africans from around the continent, and their attendance at his seminary ensured that the prosperity gospel spread like wildfire to their home countries. Mathews Ojo notes that among foreign students in the graduating class of 1988, a typical year at Idahosa’s seminary, there were fifteen students from Ghana, seven from Chad, four from the Ivory Coast, three from Kenya, two from Cameroon, and one each from Sierra Leone and Togo.<sup>504</sup> Many of these students went on to launch the first neo-Pentecostal churches in their countries, with Nicholas Duncan Williams of Ghana and Suleiman Umar of Niger being prime examples.<sup>505</sup>

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<sup>501</sup> Ojo, *The End-Time Army*, 62.

<sup>502</sup> Anderson, *To The Ends of the Earth*, 235.

<sup>503</sup> Ojo, *The End-Time Army*, 62.

<sup>504</sup> Ojo, *The End-Time Army*.

<sup>505</sup> Ojo, *The End-Time Army*, 63.

## Global Connections

As mentioned earlier, in the section exploring the roots of the UCKG in Brazil, Benson Idahosa became, in 1982, part of a quartet of ministers who claimed apostolic succession through a special decree from Pope Paul VI. They went on to form the first College of Bishops in the World Communion of Pentecostal Churches, later known as the International Communion of Charismatic Churches.<sup>506</sup> Idahosa was the only member of the College who did not hail from North America. His inclusion in this group reflected the stature he had garnered during the past decade within the burgeoning Pentecostal community in Africa, but also his fame and significance in the Pentecostal community around the world. In his early days Idahosa had received financial support from American Pentecostal leaders, such as Gordon Lindsey, Oral Roberts, and Jim Bakker.<sup>507</sup> An appearance on Bakker's infamous PTL Club television show led to the US preacher's contribution of camera equipment and technical know-how to assist in the production of Idahosa's "Redemption Hour."<sup>508</sup> In turn, Idahosa would help Bakker obtain a time slot for his television show on the Nigerian state television network. As his Pentecostal stature grew, Idahosa was increasingly asked to speak at neo-Pentecostal and charismatic conferences around the world. Ojo notes that by the mid-1980s Idahosa had spoken or conducted evangelistic crusades, (see figure 9)<sup>509</sup> in seventy-six countries.<sup>510</sup> Kate Bowler, through her incisive tracking of *Charisma* magazine advertisements, found that Idahosa was a frequent speaker at Pentecostal conferences in the United States where he

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<sup>506</sup> "Historical Perspective of the I.C.C.C." The International Fellowship of Charismatic Churches, <http://www.theiccc.com/aboutUs.html>.

<sup>507</sup> Lyons and Lyons, "Magical medicine on television," 111.

<sup>508</sup> Lyons and Lyons, "Magical Medicine on television," 115.

<sup>509</sup> Figure 9. "Benson Idahosa ministering abroad," photograph,

[http://www.myhero.com/go/hero.asp?hero=B\\_Idahosa\\_LC\\_GSSG\\_nigeria\\_0](http://www.myhero.com/go/hero.asp?hero=B_Idahosa_LC_GSSG_nigeria_0), (accessed February 3, 2014).

<sup>510</sup> Ojo, *The End-Time Army*, 62

shared the stage with such prosperity gospel luminaries as Morris Cerullo, Myles Munro, Jerry Savelle, and Rod Parsley.<sup>511</sup>



**Figure 9:** *Benson Idahosa ministering abroad.*

### **Episcopal Polity and the Acquisition of Titles**

As an independent Pentecostal entrepreneur, Idahosa wanted nothing to do with classical Pentecostal church governance which emphasized a congregational polity that was tied into a denominational hierarchy. From the outset of his ministry he wanted total control over his religious enterprise, which is why he instituted an episcopal polity featuring a centralized, bureaucratic organization that reported through channels to him.<sup>512</sup> Whenever he appeared in public at religious services or other official functions,

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<sup>511</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 120 and 258.

<sup>512</sup> Ogbu Kalu, "Holy Praiseco: Negotiating Sacred and Popular Music and Dance in African Pentecostalism," in *The Collected Essays of Ogbu Uke Kalu, Volume 1, African Pentecostalism: Global*

he always dressed in the robes and mitre of a major religious figure, a theatrical device which served to confirm his authority. He also perceived there to be value in titles, as during his career he was variously addressed as Reverend, Doctor, Professor, Bishop and Archbishop. Idahosa also founded the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), which was a marginal organization when it began, but through his leadership skills was transformed into a major force within the Christian Association of Nigeria.<sup>513</sup> The Archbishop used his apostolic succession authority to attract other entrepreneurial Pentecostals to the PFN. This new breed of ministers, like Idahosa, also desired titles to add some form of legitimacy to their need for episcopal governance in the churches they founded and turned into denominations. For the most part these ministers, be they Idahosa's mentees, like his former student, David Oyedepo, or those attracted by his perceived social or financial acumen, simply wanted to emulate his success. This could be clearly seen at Idahosa's funeral.

### **The Passing of a Titan**

Often death and funerals are given little prominence among the prosperity gospel crowd because they are linked to "negative confession."<sup>514</sup> But Benson Idahosa was no ordinary minister, and his family and church gave him a send-off worthy of a monarch. More than thirty thousand people showed up at the stadium on the Miracle Centre university campus where the funeral ceremony, dubbed the "Coronation to Eternal Glory," was held.<sup>515</sup> Idahosa was buried in a spectacular marble and Arabian tiled tomb, but not before he was praised by Pentecostal celebrities from around the world, as well as

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*Discourses, Migrations, Exchanges and Connections* eds. Wilhelmina J. Kalu, Nimi Wariboko, and Toyin Falola (Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc., 2010), 100.

<sup>513</sup> Marshall, *Political Spiritualities*, 178.

<sup>514</sup> For an insightful review of the praxis involving the prosperity gospel tenet of the denial of death see an aptly entitled subsection "And the Life Everlasting, Amen," in Bowler, *Blessed*, 172-177.

<sup>515</sup> Marshall, *Political Spiritualities*, 178.

high ranking cabinet ministers and military personnel from Nigeria. The Nigerian Press gave prominence to the many Pentecostal leaders of Nigeria who were there to honor their role model and mentor, including Bishop David Oyedepo, Bishop Godwin Elomobor, and Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor.<sup>516</sup>

At Idahosa's passing many assumed that one of his senior pastors would take over the ministry, but to the surprise of most of the faithful, the archbishop's wife, Margaret, took control of the religious empire. This move was astonishing, because Margaret Idahosa had never previously shown any public interest in the gospel, preferring to be involved exclusively in the commercial holdings of the family. Perhaps, however, Archbishop Margaret, as she is now known, wanted to keep the successful business in the hands of the family, something she has managed to do for the last fifteen years.<sup>517</sup>

### **The Idahosa Legacy**

The archbishop left behind a thriving ministry and extensive financial holdings. More than that, however, he created a spiritual and religious ideal, a model that thousands of African neo-Pentecostal pastors have tried to emulate. What Idahosa had become was the first "Big Man of God" in African Christianity. The "Big Man" abstraction was first popularized in the novels of Chinua Achebe, and at its essence it represents an empowered person who has fame, some dignity, and a modicum of moral scruples.<sup>518</sup> Many post-colonial dictators, such as Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seiko, were seen as the political "Big Men," of Africa. Idahosa, however, was the first of his kind in the field of religion, and given his fame, ostentatious lifestyle, and social power, he spawned a host

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<sup>516</sup> Marshall, *Political Spiritualities*, 179.

<sup>517</sup> Marshall, *Political Spiritualities*, 180.

<sup>518</sup> Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 113-114.

of imitators, including some that have surpassed him on a number of fronts, two of whom will be explored in the following sections.

### **The Redeemed Christian Church of God**

Perhaps the most astounding success story in modern African Christianity is the saga of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG). In the wake of the global neo-Pentecostal surge, this small ethnic *Aladura* church, in southwest Nigeria, was the sole AIC to “surf on the wave of revival” and transform itself into a prosperity gospel powerhouse.<sup>519</sup> This church was founded by Josiah Akindayomi (1909–1980) who grew up in an Ondo City home where his parents worshipped *Ogun*, the Yoruba deity of iron and warfare.<sup>520</sup> When he was eighteen Akindayomi was baptized in an Anglican church, but four years later he left the mainline denomination for one of the more popular *Aladura* churches that was springing up, the Eternal Sacred Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim (C & S).<sup>521</sup>

The C & S, like all the *Aladura* churches, offered a syncretic blend of Yoruba traditional religious practices and historic mission Christianity. Some of the former included the practices of polygamy and ancestor worship, the latter exemplified in visiting the grave of the church founder, where contentious issues were settled.<sup>522</sup> Within this milieu Akindayomi began to feel the call to minister, which was not shocking considering his earlier practice as a traditional healer. He would go from house to house, dressed in the white flowing robes of the C & S, preaching and praying for the sick.<sup>523</sup>

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<sup>519</sup> Marshall, *Pentecostal Spiritualities*, 74.

<sup>520</sup> Olufunke Adeboye, “Arrowhead of Nigerian Pentecostalism: The Redeemed Christian Church of God, 1952-2005,” *Pneuma* 29, no. 1 (2007): 32.

<sup>521</sup> Adeboye, “Arrowhead of Nigerian Pentecostalism.”

<sup>522</sup> Adeboye, “Arrowhead of Nigerian Pentecostalism,” 33.

<sup>523</sup> Asonzeh Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power: A Study of the Redeemed Christian Church Of God in Nigeria* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2008), 25.

Eventually he came to see himself as a prophet, and he amassed a devoted following within the C & S. Not surprisingly, the C & S hierarchy were not pleased with this development, and they expelled Akindayomi and his followers in 1952. With this band of followers Akindayomi created a new church, which eventually became the RCCG.

### **The Akindayomi Church**

As was typical of the membership of all AIC churches, the believers of Akindayomi's new church were poor and had little, if any, formal education. Asonzeh Ukah characterizes these worshippers as mainly "uneducated women and artisans," with the women being attracted to the leader's supposed ability, through prayer, to help the barren conceive children.<sup>524</sup> To help it achieve more legitimacy, and to obtain some financial and material resources, Akindayomi, in 1954, inaugurated a relationship with the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, a largely white denomination that was founded by John G. Lake, an Azusa Street participant, in 1908.<sup>525</sup> This association "Pentecostalized" the Akindayomi church to a considerable degree, which was reflected in the new doctrines espoused by the church and in how the group presented itself. Initially he labelled his organization the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, Nigeria Branch, but this was shortly modified to Apostolic Faith Mission of West Africa.<sup>526</sup> With regard to church doctrine, Akindayomi retained the *Aladura* praying tradition of the C & S, as well as its holiness emphasis. It added Biblical inerrancy and speaking in tongues from the Pentecostal association, while both sides of the partnership shared strong traditions in the belief of miracles, visions, and prophecies.<sup>527</sup>

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<sup>524</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 38.

<sup>525</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 43.

<sup>526</sup> Adeboye, "Arrowhead of Nigerian Pentecostalism," 35.

<sup>527</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 37.

In terms of practice, the church drew a sharp line between believers and “the world.” To outsiders, church members exhibited strong personal ethics and a pronounced dislike of materialism.<sup>528</sup> It also drew rigid boundaries between men and women, with the latter being subjected to strict clothing and fashion rules, such as no makeup, jewelry, or visiting hair salons, as well as a prohibition from riding motor cycles.<sup>529</sup> Within church services, musical instruments were forbidden, as was clapping hands during hymns; but what was encouraged was crying and sobbing during prayers. As a result, the church earned the moniker of “the weeping church” which, along with its strict doctrines and practices, seemed to do little to foster membership.<sup>530</sup>

When Nigeria obtained its independence in 1960, the church broke off its ties to South Africa, because in newly liberated Africa, any links with the apartheid regime became anathema. This event seemed to spur a prophetic vision for Akindayomi, as he reports that God instructed him to rename the church the Redeemed Christian Church of God.<sup>531</sup> Despite its divine mandate from God, the RCCG had not created a significant footprint on the religious stage of Nigeria when its founder died in 1980, given that only thirty-nine churches, all located in the Yoruba heartland of southwest Nigeria, had been established.<sup>532</sup> Meanwhile, in the greater religious community of Nigeria, massive growth in Pentecostal churches was occurring. With the death of its founder, the RCCG was at a critical crossroads.

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<sup>528</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*.

<sup>529</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 41.

<sup>530</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*.

<sup>531</sup> Adeboye, “Arrowhead of Nigerian Pentecostalism, 35-36.

<sup>532</sup> Adeboye, “Arrowhead of Nigerian Pentecostalism, 37.



## A New Leader Emerges

Throughout history people have looked to religion during times of personal crisis, and this factor was particularly noticeable in early Pentecostalism.<sup>533</sup> This reality perfectly describes the situation in 1973 that confronted a young professor of mathematics at the University of Lagos, Enoch Adeboye, who turned to the RCCG at the urging of his wife when their daughter became critically ill.<sup>534</sup> The family had consulted doctors and hospitals, Muslim *Alfas* and *imams*, as well as traditional medical practitioners, before finally settling on the RCCG.<sup>535</sup> Shortly after visiting the church Adeboye was “saved.” He became an enthusiastic convert, even though his daughter ultimately died from her illness. Initially he became a lay preacher before being ordained a pastor in 1975.<sup>536</sup> By this time he had become Akindayomi’s translator from Yoruba to English, as well as a personal favorite of the aging and revered leader. Adeboye was also a distinctly different type of pastor within the denomination, being highly educated and overtly modern.

When Akindayomi died in 1980 it was discovered that he had left several documents, including a will and an audio cassette proclaiming that Adeboye was to be appointed his successor, even though the church constitution called for an election to choose a replacement for the leader.<sup>537</sup> Though this did cause some consternation among Akindayomi’s long-time associates, Adeboye was installed as the new General Overseer of the RCCG on January 20, 1981.<sup>538</sup> He quickly consolidated his hold on the RCCG, and

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<sup>533</sup> Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited*, 227.

<sup>534</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 72-74.

<sup>535</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 72.

<sup>536</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 61.

<sup>537</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 62-64.

<sup>538</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 65.

then, during most of the next decade he methodically re-engineered and transformed his denomination.

### **A Change of Direction**

One of the first initiatives that Adeboye pursued was to liberalize much of the puritanical holiness culture that permeated the RCCG. He started by introducing modern musical instruments, complete with electronic sound systems, and he encouraged congregants to express themselves more freely through songs, hand clapping, and dance.<sup>539</sup> At the same time, offerings were now collected during church services, and he followed this move up by promoting the ordination of women as pastors.<sup>540</sup> All of these changes were triggered to bring the RCCG into the late twentieth century and to make it more attractive to the burgeoning Christian and Pentecostal community of Nigeria.

With these new practices in place, Adeboye accelerated the pace of change by launching the concept of the “Model Parish” in 1988. According to RCCG literature these model parishes specifically target “young intellectuals, high society women, top government officials, military officers, successful executives, academics and university students,”<sup>541</sup> exactly the type of people who would have rarely or never set foot in the existing churches, which quickly became known as “classical parishes.” These model parish churches were typically headed by a young professional or academic and were often set in venues that were novel, radical, and modern, such as in movie houses, nightclubs, theatres, or hotels.<sup>542</sup> They were wildly successful in Lagos, the hub of the RCCG, and were quickly introduced in major cities around the country. Clearly Adeboye

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<sup>539</sup> Adeboye, “Arrowhead of Nigerian Pentecostalism,” 38.

<sup>540</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 84.

<sup>541</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 112.

<sup>542</sup> Adeboye, “Arrowhead of Nigerian Pentecostalism,” 39.

was responding to the changes he was witnessing in the Nigerian Christian community, but he was also adapting to his local milieu many ideas he had garnered elsewhere.

### **Adeboye's External Influences and Their Application**

In 1979 Josiah Akindayomi and a few of his top pastors, including Enoch Adeboye, attended Kenneth Hagin's Holy Ghost *Campmeeting* in Tulsa, Oklahoma.<sup>543</sup> Adeboye made the pilgrimage to Oklahoma every year for the *Campmeeting* until the early 1990s and it was here at the *axis mundi* of the Word of Faith universe that he soaked up the finer points of the prosperity gospel.<sup>544</sup> During the 1980 meeting Adeboye heard a prophecy, spoken in tongues and translated, which he deemed was delivered especially for him. The "divine" message proclaimed that someone in the audience "from a foreign land" would, with God's help, start something that "will be very big."<sup>545</sup>

Soon after assuming the leadership of the RCCG, Adeboye began introducing the theology of the prosperity gospel to his denomination, initially in the form of a series of sermons on the importance of giving. Not only did he introduce offerings in church, where they are sometimes taken as many as four times during a service, but he also introduced them at Bible studies and choir practices.<sup>546</sup> His first published sermon on the subject, which was widely disseminated throughout his denomination, appeared in 1989 in response to the Nigerian government's austerity program. Appropriately, it was entitled *How to turn your Austerity to Prosperity*.<sup>547</sup>

Intent on expanding his church, Adeboye travelled to Seoul, Korea, in 1983 to study the church-building techniques of David Yonggi Cho's Yoido Full Gospel

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<sup>543</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 153.

<sup>544</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 249.

<sup>545</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 122-123.

<sup>546</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 153.

<sup>547</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 185.

Church.<sup>548</sup> He returned to Nigeria full of enthusiasm for Cho's cell church concept, and he introduced it to the RCCG as the "Home Fellowship" practice. This initiative was a direct application of the Cho approach to neighbourhood evangelizing, and it would be used extensively as the church expanded out of its Yoruba heartland into other parts of Nigeria, and went abroad to Europe and the Americas.<sup>549</sup> It is also interesting to note that both the Hagin and Cho connections to Adeboye illustrate Coleman's point about the international networks within the prosperity gospel.

### **The Takeoff**

The first four objectives in the RCCG mission statement lead to a simple, powerful, and galvanizing final goal for the denomination's evangelizing focus. As taken from the church's Australian web page, it reads: "we will plant churches within 5 minutes walking distance in every city and town of developing countries and within 5 minutes driving distance in every city and town of developed countries."<sup>550</sup> From the late 1980s this church planting objective has been the single-minded obsession of the RCCG, remembering that there were exactly thirty-nine parishes when Adeboye assumed the General Overseer position in 1981.

Approximately 70 percent of the RCCG churches in Nigeria are located in the southwest of the country, with over half of those being in the sprawling megacity of Lagos, Africa's largest city.<sup>551</sup> The remaining churches are split between the northern and

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<sup>548</sup> Adeboye, "Arrowhead of Nigerian Pentecostalism," 50.

<sup>549</sup> Adeboye, "Arrowhead of Nigerian Pentecostal Power." For an intriguing Lethbridge application of the RCCG church planting strategy see Appendix 5.

<sup>550</sup> Redeemed Christian Church of God, Mission Statement, RCCG Worldwide, accessed November, 26, 2013, [http://rccgsw.org.au/?page\\_id=16](http://rccgsw.org.au/?page_id=16). Throughout this thesis several websites from Global South prosperity gospel denominations are cited. The websites serving western nations in particular, such as the Australian website above, are state of the art marketing tools for these churches. They reflect the technical sophistication and marketing acumen of these denominations.

<sup>551</sup> Adeboye, "Arrowhead of Nigerian Pentecostalism," 41.

southeastern sectors of the country. Many of the churches outside of the Yoruba heartland were planted by Southwest Nigerians members of the RCCG who had received job transfers to outlying areas, or young people who were conscripted into the one-year national service requirement of the National Youth Service Corps.<sup>552</sup> Often these churches started as Bible study groups that met in the homes of believers before a critical mass was acquired to found a church.

Compared to other Pentecostal denominations using the megachurch concept in evangelizing the Global South, the RCCG, wherever they are found, tend to be concentrated in smaller congregations, with many having as few as one hundred members.<sup>553</sup> Utilizing the evangelization methods described above has enabled the RCCG to quickly assemble many parishes throughout Nigeria and the world.<sup>554</sup> Ukah's study confirms that by 2005 there were 8,500 parishes in Nigeria<sup>555</sup> and by 2008 they had grown to encompass four million members in the home country and a million abroad.<sup>556</sup> RCCG members outside of Africa consist in the main of people from the Nigerian diaspora, or of other African migrants.<sup>557</sup> It was reported that as of 2002 the RCCG was operating in fifty countries, thirty of which were in Africa,<sup>558</sup> a number that grew to 147 countries by 2013.<sup>559</sup>

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<sup>552</sup> Adeboye, "Arrowhead of Nigerian Pentecostalism," 40.

<sup>553</sup> Adeboye, "Arrowhead of Nigerian Pentecostalism."

<sup>554</sup> In a recent article Simon Coleman speculates that because of the RCCG's church planting strategy it "is probably the largest private landholder in Nigeria." See Simon Coleman, "Only (Dis-)Connect: Pentecostal Global Networking as Revelation and Concealment," *Religions* 4 (2013), 378, doi: 10.3390/re14030367.

<sup>555</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 90.

<sup>556</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 295.

<sup>557</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 306.

<sup>558</sup> Adeboye, "Arrowhead of Nigerian Pentecostalism," 46.

<sup>559</sup> Leonardo Blair, "Nigeria's Redeemed Christian Church of God Dedicates \$15.5M Pavilion Center in Texas," *The Christian Post*, June 20, 2013. <http://www.christianpost.com/news/nigerias-redeemed-christian-church-of-god-dedicates-15-5m-pavilion-center-in-texas-98466/>.

Foreign churches have proven to be extremely profitable for the RCCG, and they send a significant amount of funds back to church headquarters in Nigeria.<sup>560</sup> Ukah notes that the RCCG members of the US and the UK have been largely responsible for funding the extensive and expensive broadcasting and technological infrastructure of the church.<sup>561</sup> Being the shrewd religious entrepreneur that he is, Adeboye has adjusted his travel schedule accordingly. For the last several years Adeboye has spent just the first week of each month in Nigeria, with the rest of his time being focused on visiting his parishes, not in Africa, but primarily in Europe, North America, Australia, and Asia.<sup>562</sup> This point is noteworthy on two counts. The most obvious is that Adeboye is spending three weeks out of four in the developed world, where only 20 percent of his flock reside. An ordinary member from the RCCG in the developed world can, however, provide considerably more tithes and offerings than can an ordinary member from Nigeria. The second point is more subtle. The fact that Adeboye chooses to work in Nigeria the first week of every month is no accident. Ukah has observed that Pentecostal churches in Nigeria plan most of their significant religious gatherings, such as all night prayer vigils, on the Friday evening closest to when salaries are paid.<sup>563</sup> As for Adeboye's excessive international travel, this burden has been eased since 2009 when the church secured a private jet, a Gulfstream IV, for his use. This jet was featured in a recent story about an Adeboye trip to Saskatchewan,<sup>564</sup> a province which, according to the RCCG Canadian

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<sup>560</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 306.

<sup>561</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 149.

<sup>562</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 297.

<sup>563</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 256.

<sup>564</sup> "Gulfstream IV Aircraft Belonging to Jet-Setting Pastor Adeboye Spotted in Canada," *Sahara Reporters*, June 28, 2013.

website, has eight parishes, four of which are in Saskatoon, with two more in Regina and one each in Prince Albert and Warman.<sup>565</sup>

### **Making Up for Small Parishes**

The RCCG's relatively small size of its average parish is made up for with massive public events, most of which are held at Redemption Camp. The story of Redemption Camp mirrors the spectacular growth of the RCCG and the tenure of its lionized leader. It began in 1983 when the church bought a property mid-way between Lagos and Ibadon, just off of Nigeria's busiest and best maintained highway.<sup>566</sup> According to the lore of the RCCG, the sight was divinely chosen by God, who then instructed Mrs. Folu Adeboye, the leader's wife, of the location through a dream.<sup>567</sup> Originally a small plot of land that was to serve as a venue for prayer vigils, it has inexorably grown to become more than ten square kilometres of prime real estate.<sup>568</sup> Over a thirty-year period it has evolved from Redemption Camp into Redemption City, an exclusive neo-Pentecostal community of ten thousand upper-class residents, and the international headquarters of the RCCG.<sup>569</sup>

In a recent article, Nigerian journalists contrast the noise, disorder, decay, and chaos of most of Nigeria's cities with the serene, orderly, efficient, and corruption-free environment of Redemption City.<sup>570</sup> The efficacy of Redemption City is a result of the professional management of the RCCG, which has also contributed a twenty-first century

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<sup>565</sup> "The Redeemed Christian Church of God Canada-Parish Directory," RCCG Canada, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.rccgcanada.org/parish-directory/parish-category/sk-1/>.

<sup>566</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 258.

<sup>567</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 319.

<sup>568</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 89.

<sup>569</sup> Ajibola Amzat, Armsfree Ajanaku and Laolu Adeyemi, "Redemption Camp: Largest 'City of God' on earth," *The Guardian-Nigeria*, September 24, 2013, <http://www.nguardiannews.com/national-news/133775-redemption-camp-largest-city-of-god-on-earth->.

<sup>570</sup> Amzat, Ajanaku and Adeyemi, "Redemption Camp."

infrastructure consisting of paved roads, a 10-megawatt power generation plant that provides continuous power, and an independent water treatment dam that supplies potable water. These basic commodities, taken for granted in the developed world, are in short supply in much of the Global South, and in Nigeria in particular.

The primary purpose of Redemption City, however, is as a site for religious ceremonies which occur throughout the year. To RCCG members it has become a Holy City, a pilgrimage centre much like Mecca, which draws the faithful from around the globe.<sup>571</sup> There are two noteworthy events that require elaboration, the first of which are the Holy Ghost Services. The Holy Ghost Services are held on Thursday and Friday evenings of the first weekend of each month. As mentioned earlier, the first weekend is chosen by the RCCG hierarchy because it coincides with the closest weekend to the issuance of the attendee's monthly pay-cheques.<sup>572</sup> The Thursday meeting caters to young people, while the Friday event is promoted as "an interdenominational miracle service."<sup>573</sup> When the Holy Ghost Services began in 1983 they attracted modest crowds of two thousand people. Today these numbers have grown to more than three hundred thousand devotees for the Friday service.<sup>574</sup> These events are all-night services that feature massive participatory rituals of prayer, singing, praise and of course elaborate offering ceremonies. The RCCG has found that the favorable publicity for this type of mass service are so advantageous for proselytizing that it has established them throughout their far-flung world, though not on a monthly basis. For example, there are now three

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<sup>571</sup> Adebayo, "Arrowhead of Nigerian Pentecostalism," 48.

<sup>572</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 296.

<sup>573</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 240-41.

<sup>574</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 240.



Holy Ghost Services held each year in London where meetings began as a one-off experiment in 1994.<sup>575</sup>

An even more spectacular display of the ability of the RCCG to draw a crowd is the annual Holy Ghost Congress, which takes place at Redemption City in December, (see figure 10).<sup>576</sup> At the 2012 Congress more than two million people attended worship services, with as many as six million pilgrims on the grounds of Redemption City.<sup>577</sup> According to the RCCG, this makes the Holy Ghost Congress the largest gathering of Christians anywhere on the globe.<sup>578</sup> (It would also make the Holy Ghost Congress twice the size of the much more famous annual religious gathering in Mecca.) Ukah more cynically describes the Holy Ghost Congress as a “spiritual, social and economic jamboree.”<sup>579</sup> (For an example of an event that would seem to justify Ukah’s cynicism, see figure 11.)<sup>580</sup> No doubt Ukah’s reference to an economic jamboree reflects the fact that broadcast rights for the event are regularly auctioned off to networks like the BBC and CNN, and, as well, hundreds of major companies are sold the rights to advertize, display, and sell merchandise on the grounds.<sup>581</sup>

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<sup>575</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 245.

<sup>576</sup> Figure 10 represents part of the seating for the two million worshippers who annually take in services at the Holy Ghost Congress of the RCCG at Redemption Camp, Nigeria. “Redemption Camp, Nigeria, 2013,” photograph, 2013, <http://www.timmynaija.com/blog/general/churches-have-failed-nigerians//>, (accessed February 3, 2014).

<sup>577</sup> Amzat, Ajanaku and Adeyemi, “Redemption Camp.”

<sup>578</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 251.

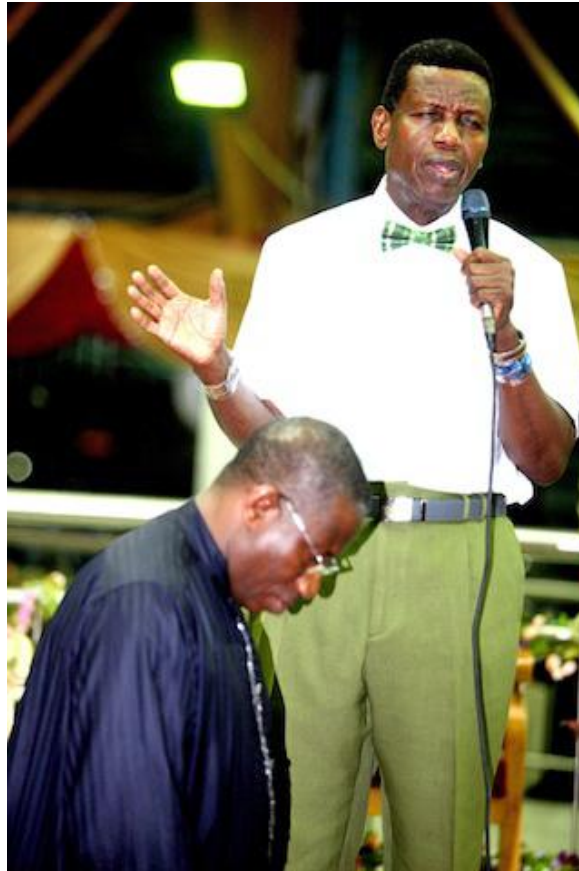
<sup>579</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 246.

<sup>580</sup> Figure 11. Pastor Adeboye, at the 2012 Holy Ghost Congress, praying for the President of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan. It seems that being seen at Redemption Camp and being prayed for by Pastor Adeboye is a potent political move for the President who received a similar blessing during the campaign for the 2011 election. “Pastor Adeboye prays for Goodluck Jonathan, President of Nigeria, at Redemption Camp, 2012” photograph, 2012, <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/12goodluck-jonathan-and-thepotency-of-symbolism/>, (accessed February 3, 2014).

<sup>581</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 246-47.



**Figure 10:** *Redemption Camp, Nigeria, 2013.*



**Figure 11:** *Pastor Adeboye prays for Goodluck Jonathan, President of Nigeria, at Redemption Camp, 2012.*

## **The Economic Influence of the RCCG**

Unlike the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, a Global South denomination with which the RCCG is often compared, the Nigerian church does not appear to be amassing wealth for the benefit of its principal leaders, or to demonstrate its prominence through ostentatious cathedrals. The RCCG has instead funneled its wealth into more constructive and socially responsible channels. To continue spreading its Pentecostal message, the RCCG, through its communication arm (the Dove Media Group, headquartered in Dallas), has developed a sophisticated television and internet service to its far-flung followers.<sup>582</sup> Trumpet Internet Television, a subsidiary of Dove, provides Nigeria with a cluster of television and internet services. The expertise of the RCCG communication team can also be seen in the practical local websites that service church followers in each of the countries in which it operates around the globe.

Like most of the significant neo-Pentecostal denominations that dominate in the Global South, the RCCG has its own travel agency, publishing house, property management firm, and mortgage company, all of which cater largely to the church and its members.<sup>583</sup> It also owns four banks, including the Haggai Community Bank, which is reputed to have the largest asset base of any community bank in Nigeria.<sup>584</sup>

On the social front, the RCCG operates forty-four primary and secondary schools around the country, and it also established Redeemer University in 2005.<sup>585</sup> Where it differentiates itself from most of the prosperity gospel denominations in the Global South is in the health services it provides the public. Two modern hospitals are run by the

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<sup>582</sup> Adeboye, "Arrowhead of Nigerian Pentecostalism," 45.

<sup>583</sup> Adeboye, "Arrowhead of Nigerian Pentecostalism."

<sup>584</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*, 161.

<sup>585</sup> Adeboye, "Arrowhead of Nigerian Pentecostalism," 43.

church in Lagos, and across the country more than fifty primary health centres for women and children have been established.<sup>586</sup>

Another intriguing economic development by the RCCG is the duplication, albeit on a minor scale, of Redemption City in North Texas. In 2005 the church bought land in Floyd, Texas, near Dallas—Fort Worth, where it proposed to build a ten thousand seat sanctuary, schools, and an assortment of recreation facilities.<sup>587</sup> This announcement angered many in North Texas who were concerned with large numbers of Africans showing up in the rural, Caucasian community. Undaunted, the church continued with its plan, claiming that God revealed to Pastor Adeboye that he was to construct this complex in Floyd.<sup>588</sup> In 2013, on schedule, the RCCG completed the first phase of its Texas complex with the opening of its Pavilion Center, which seats ten thousand and to which an additional five wings of seating will be added within three years, primarily to serve the spiritual needs of the more than fifty parishes found in North Texas.<sup>589</sup>

### **The Cult of Adeboye**

In his home country of Nigeria, Enoch Adeboye enjoys an excellent reputation, something that could not be said about such polarizing figures as Edir Macedo in Brazil or Mike Velarde in the Philippines. The scandals and controversies associated with many megastar prosperity gospel pastors across the globe have eluded his ministry. No better example of his reputation was his winning of the Nigerian “living legend poll” in 2009.<sup>590</sup>

In this text message survey conducted by the Vanguard Media Group, Adeboye received

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<sup>586</sup> Adeboye, “Arrowhead of Nigerian Pentecostalism.”

<sup>587</sup> Adeboye, “Arrowhead of Nigerian Pentecostalism,” 45.

<sup>588</sup> Scott Farwell, “Africa’s Largest Evangelical Church Plans a New Home in Rural Texas,” *The Dallas Morning News* July 20, 2005, [http://www.amren.com/news/2005/07/africaas\\_larges/](http://www.amren.com/news/2005/07/africaas_larges/).

<sup>589</sup> Leonardo Blair, “Nigeria’s Redeemed Christian Church of God Dedicates \$15.5M Pavilion Center in Texas,” *Christian Post*, June 20, 2013.

<sup>590</sup> Kayode Mathew, “Adeboye, Kanu, Ojukwu, Gani, Soyinka win living legend poll,” *Vanguard*, June 17, 2009, <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2009/06/adeboye-kanu-ojukwu-gani-soyinka-win-living-legend-poll/>.

more than 30 percent of the vote. His closest competitor, the captain of the Nigerian National soccer team, received 10 percent of the vote. Interestingly, the criteria used for survey nomination was, according to Vanguard, “selfless service, enduring achievements, sincerity of purpose, resilience, patriotism, uprightness, respectability and incorruptibility.”<sup>591</sup> These are characteristics that are not usually associated with prosperity gospel ministers.

Among his followers Adeboye’s reputation is even more august, bordering on adulation and approaching worship. Across the RCCG world he is affectionately known as “Daddy GO,” with the “GO” moniker standing for General Overseer.<sup>592</sup> Ukah points out, however, that Adeboye and his followers do not see the term “Daddy” as a familial reference. Instead, it connotes Adeboye’s direct link to God, because when your earthly spiritual father blesses you, it is fully recognized by God, the source of all blessings.<sup>593</sup>

Exemplifying this interpretation of Adeboye as a demi-god is the reaction of many RCCG members after Daddy GO delivers a sermon. Ukah reports that during each service at Redemption Camp, Adeboye will preach from an elevated altar, during which time he will pray by sitting down, kneeling, or prostrating himself several times during his message.<sup>594</sup> At the end of each service there is a “scramble by worshippers who struggle to be the first to touch, prostrate or lie” in the same spots used by Adeboye.<sup>595</sup> Apparently this is because Adeboye teaches that his anointing power and ability to deliver miracles is facilitated through anything he touches, such as prayer cloths, chairs he sits in, or the clothes he wears. Touching such objects can deliver prosperity or

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<sup>591</sup> Mathew, Adeboye, Kanu, Ojukwu, Gani, Soyinka win living legend poll.”

<sup>592</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostalism*, 101.

<sup>593</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostalism*.

<sup>594</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostalism*, 264

<sup>595</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostalism*.

healing.<sup>596</sup> This activity is further evidenced by a story Adeboye tells that occurred during a Holy Ghost Service. Apparently God told him not to change his underwear for several days, a decision which Adeboye dutifully carried out. Then, following God's instructions, Adeboye asked his wife to take his singlet and touch each person in the throng of people who had arrived to be prayed for by Daddy GO.<sup>597</sup> Such is the apparent power of Adeboye to his followers.

Adeboye's power and authority cuts both ways, however. Through his anointing one can receive a miracle, but for anyone who does not pay their tithes or respond to his calls for offerings, theirs is an unhappy lot. He labels them as the "children of perdition" who will go to hell, even if they attend the RCCG, because they are robbers, robbers of God, the RCCG, and God's anointed, those being special people like himself.<sup>598</sup>

The irony of the religious scene in Nigeria is that the prosperity gospel is so popular and pervasive that Adeboye and the RCCG are not perceived to be the prime exemplars of the theology, despite "Daddy GO's" writings and sermons on the subject. These findings were illustrated in research carried out by theologian George Folarin who conducted a survey of students at three historic mission seminaries to ascertain what these future ministers perceived to be the primary message of some of the major Nigerian denominations espousing the prosperity gospel. The students saw the RCCG as emphasizing deliverance from sin and sickness, two classical Pentecostal doctrines, as more important to the church than the prosperity gospel.<sup>599</sup> Also, professor of Religious Studies, Mathews Ojo, when identifying the most significant prosperity gospel preachers

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<sup>596</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostalism*, 233.

<sup>597</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostalism*.

<sup>598</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostalism*, 179.

<sup>599</sup> George O. Folarin, "Contemporary State of the Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria," *Asia Journal of Theology* 21, no. 1 (2007): 76.

in Nigeria, did not include the name of Enoch Adeboye in his inventory of notables. Ojo began his list with the deceased Benson Idahosa and his next name, perhaps the epitome of the genre anywhere in the Pentecostal world, was David Oyedepo, the final seminal figure to be examined in this study of the prosperity gospel.<sup>600</sup>

### **David Oyedepo (1954—)**

Raised in the Yoruba state of Kwara, David Oyedepo grew up in a religiously mixed family. His mother, and the grandmother who was primarily responsible for rearing him, were members of the *Aladura* church, the Eternal Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim.<sup>601</sup> His father was a traditional Muslim healer, but the influence of the Christian grandmother steered him toward her faith. A good student, Oyedepo earned a diploma in architecture from Kwara State Polytechnic Institute, where he also became an active leader in several Christian campus groups during 1981–82.<sup>602</sup> In 1982 Oyedepo claims to have received a vision from God telling him to become a preacher in order that he might “liberate the world” from the “oppression of the devil.”<sup>603</sup> He formed a campus-based-church at the University of Ilorin in 1983 and was ordained by the newly appointed head of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), Dr. Enoch Adeboye.<sup>604</sup> During the next decade Oyedepo moved to Kaduna, in Northern Nigeria, where he created several churches and had his organization take on the name of the Living Faith Church. Here, in 1988, he was consecrated by the then president of the PFN, Benson Idahosa, as the Pentecostal Bishop of Northern Nigeria.<sup>605</sup> A short time later he moved to Lagos and

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<sup>600</sup> Mathews Ojo, *The End-Time Army*, 207.

<sup>601</sup> “Bishop David Oyedepo Biography and Early Life,” NG Vanguard, accessed January 10, 2014, <http://ngvanguard.blogspot.ca/2013/11/bishop-david-oyedepo-biography-and.html>.

<sup>602</sup> Ojo, *The End-Time Army*, 164.

<sup>603</sup> Ojo, *The End-Time Army*.

<sup>604</sup> Ojo, *The End-Time Army*, 165.

<sup>605</sup> Ojo, *The End-Time Army*.

made the city his headquarters for his fledgling denomination which was now expanding throughout the country and across the continent.

### **The Trajectory of David Oyedepo and David Oyedepo Ministries International (DOMI)**

By the end of the 1980s Oyedepo had become one of the most famous prosperity gospel preachers in Nigeria, but it was not fame that he was after. Driven by the continuous prompting that he believed he was receiving from God, in the form of visions and dreams, Oyedepo was intent on building a global ministry that was more than just preaching. His would be a ministry that would possess several robust arms of Christian witness. In 1986 he wrote his first two books and since that time he has become a publishing dynamo, releasing more than seventy works of prosperity-centred instruction.<sup>606</sup> Six years later he founded a church publishing firm, Dominion Publishing House. In 1987 he established the Word of Faith Bible Institute, where he began training protégées for his expansive church-building program. His website states that this Bible School now has training centres in every major Nigerian city and in sixty countries around the world.<sup>607</sup>

In 1995 Oyedepo began an aggressive church planting program across Nigeria, as during that year more than sixty new branches were established.<sup>608</sup> He also began an outreach to other African countries in 1995, with churches being founded in Kenya, Ethiopia, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Congo-Kinshasa.<sup>609</sup> From the outset of his

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<sup>606</sup> On his main website, David Oyedepo Ministries International, Oyedepo has constructed a timeline which outlines the major steps of his ministry. See David Oyedepo Ministries International-Home-History in Timeline, accessed October 19, 2013, <http://www2.davidoyedepoministries.org/aboutus/timeline>.

<sup>607</sup> David Oyedepo, Ministries International-Home History in Timeline.

<sup>608</sup> Ojo, *The End-Time Army*, 165.

<sup>609</sup> David Oyedepo Ministries International-Home-History in Timeline, accessed October 19, 2013, <http://www2.davidoyedepoministries.org/aboutus/timeline>.



church planting program Oyedepo adopted a markedly different strategy than did the RCCG. Instead of building hundreds of churches with relatively small congregations, all within a short driving distance of each other, Oyedepo went “large,” preferring to construct one major church in each community. By erecting one primary church building, Oyedepo’s denomination was not only making a significant architectural and religious statement, it was also able to operate on an economy of scale that the RCCG and others could not match.<sup>610</sup> To fill the church with parishioners, Oyedepo’s denomination, which has become popularly known as Winners’ Chapel, employs the marshalling technique of utilizing a fleet of buses to pick up worshippers from all over each city, including the slums. Paul Gifford has noted that, as a result of this policy, wherever Winners’ operates in Africa its congregations are the most heterogeneous, complete with the rich who arrive in SUVs and Mercedes sedans, and those who have yet to own a car.<sup>611</sup> By 2000 Winners’ had established four hundred churches in Nigeria<sup>612</sup> and one major cathedral in the capital city of thirty African countries.<sup>613</sup> The crown jewel in this church building program was the completion, in 1999, of Faith Tabernacle in suburban Lagos (see figure 12),<sup>614</sup> which with its seating capacity of over fifty thousand, is the largest church auditorium in the world.<sup>615</sup> Today, according to Oyedepo’s website,

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<sup>610</sup> Paul Gifford, *Christianity, Politics and Public Life in Kenya* (London: Hurst & Company, 2009), 121-22.

<sup>611</sup> Paul Gifford, “Healing in African Pentecostalism: The ‘Victorious Living’ of David Oyedepo,” in *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing*, ed. Candy Gunther Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 253.

<sup>612</sup> Gifford, *Christianity, Politics and Public Life in Kenya*, 121.

<sup>613</sup> Ojo, *The End-Time Army*, 166.

<sup>614</sup> Figure 12. The mother-church of the religious empire of David Oyedepo, Faith Tabernacle, is the largest church building in the world. It seats over 50,000 worshippers inside and the edifice can accommodate another 250,000 adherents in overflow seating on its expansive grounds. “The world’s largest church building, Faith Tabernacle, Canaanland, Nigeria,” photograph, <http://armchairtravelogue.blogspot.ca/2009/02/winners-chapel-faith-tabernacle-nigeria.html>, (accessed February 3, 2014).

<sup>615</sup> Ojo, *The End-Time Army*.

Winners' Chapel in Lagos is filled to its capacity of fifty thousand for four separate services each and every Sunday, and the denomination now has five thousand churches in Nigeria and another six hundred around the world.<sup>616</sup>



**Figure 12:** *The world's largest church building, Faith Tabernacle, Canaanland, Nigeria.*

In 2002 Winners' inaugurated Covenant University, which took in fifteen hundred students during its first year. It quickly established itself as the best private university in the country, and has won numerous awards for its entrepreneurship program and for overall academic excellence. For example, in 2013 Covenant won national recognition, earning the "Best Performing Higher Institution of the Year Award."<sup>617</sup> In 2011 the denomination opened another private university, Landmark University, in Kwara state.<sup>618</sup>

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<sup>616</sup> David Oyedepo Ministries International-Home-History in Timeline accessed October 19, 2013, <http://www2.davidoyedepoministries.org/aboutus/timeline>.

One church leader from another denomination is reported to have said that, next to Covenant University, his church's university "is a high school."<sup>619</sup> Such is the reputation of Covenant in Nigeria.

The main website of the church, under its timeline of significant achievements, lists the acquisition of the denomination's first (1996) and second (2004) executive jets used for ferrying Oyedepo and his entourage around the globe.<sup>620</sup> It does not mention subsequent jet purchases, but the Bishop now owns four jets (see figure 13),<sup>621</sup> and a fifth is on the way, all of which are housed at a private hanger at the major airport of Lagos.<sup>622</sup> In the general community the initial jet purchase raised eyebrows, and even more controversy arose as the jets multiplied and other prosperity gospel preachers emulated Oyedepo. But the stories of jets died down as Oyedepo's high flying ways were largely accepted by most in Pentecostal circles as the twenty-first century method of spreading the gospel. Very little controversy erupted when *Forbes* magazine wrote a story on the five richest pastors in Nigeria, all of them prosperity gospel stalwarts. David Oyedepo topped the list with an estimated net worth of \$150 million.<sup>623</sup> Any theological message that can generate such spectacular results is worth examining.

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<sup>617</sup> "Covenant University wins Best Performing Higher Institution of the Year Award 2013," *Covenant University*, accessed October 20, 2013, <http://www.covenantuniversity.edu.ng/News/Covenant-University-wins-Best-Performing-Higher-Institution-of-the-Year-Award-2013#.UmQB31MUbd4>.

<sup>618</sup> David Oyedepo Ministries International-Home-History in Timeline. Accessed October 19, 2013, <http://domi.org.ng/aboutus/timeline>.

<sup>619</sup> Nimi Wariboko, "Pentecostal Paradigms of National Economic Prosperity in Africa," in *Pentecostalism and Prosperity*, eds. Katherine Attanasi and Amos Yong, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 43.

<sup>620</sup> David Oyedepo Ministries International-Home-History in Timeline, accessed October 19, 2013, <http://www2.davidoyedepoministries.org/aboutus/timeline>.

<sup>621</sup> Figure 13. "David Oyedepo relaxing on one of his five corporate jets," photograph, <http://www.nairaland.com/677899/exclusive-pictures-bishop-david-oyedepo>, (accessed February 3, 2014).

<sup>622</sup> Femi Oyewale, "Bishop Oyedepo acquires N4.5b Jet. Builds private hanger at MMIA," *Ecomium Magazine* April 7, 2011, <http://www.nigeriafilms.com/news/11243/33/bishop-oyedepo-acquires-n45b-jet-builds-private-ha.html>.

<sup>623</sup> Mfonobong Nsehe, "The Five Richest Pastors In Nigeria," *Forbes*, July 6, 2011, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/mfonobongnsehe/2011/06/07/the-five-richest-pastors-in-nigeria/>.



Figure 13: David Oyedepo, left, relaxing on one of his five corporate jets.

### **The Theology of David Oyedepo**

Most stars of the prosperity gospel world write books about their ministries or about their beliefs in God. It would be difficult, however, to find a prosperity preacher who has been a more prolific author than David Oyedepo, who has published more than seventy books, mostly on the subjects of success and prosperity. For the purposes of this paper, four of Oyedepo's books were examined, those being *Understanding Financial Prosperity* (2005), *Success Buttons* (2005), *Winning The War Against Poverty* (2006), and *The Unlimited Power Of Faith: Operating in a world of unlimited possibilities* (2011). The most apparent common denominator of these books is the importance Oyedepo attaches to covenant relationship that believers have with God, and in particular how this covenant relates to wealth.<sup>624</sup> The scripture that is most often used to substantiate this claim is Deuteronomy 8:18. In *Success Buttons*, Oyedepo asserts that

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<sup>624</sup> David Oyedepo, *Understanding Financial Prosperity*, (Lagos: Dominion Publishing House, 2005), 23.

success is “your covenant right,”<sup>625</sup> while in *Winning The War Against Poverty*, he devotes a chapter to building a “covenant platform.”<sup>626</sup> The biblical role model for the ideal covenant relationship and for having faith in the covenant is Abraham,<sup>627</sup> who in James 2: 23 is described as “the friend of God.” Other Old Testament heroes for Oyedepo are Joseph, Noah, Elijah, and, not surprisingly, his namesake, David.

With regard to the preceding paragraph, Oyedepo’s theology is basically the conventional prosperity gospel, which insists that the Bible is a contemporary document and the blessings which God bestowed to Abraham and made him wealthy are equally appropriate for Christians today.<sup>628</sup> It is not surprising, then, that his modern role model is Kenneth Hagin. Apparently, after reading Hagin’s literature for years, Oyedepo attended a 1986 Hagin seminar in the US, desiring to possess the same “Spirit at work in that man.”<sup>629</sup> Accordingly he prayed, “Whatever makes Hagin Hagin, Jesus, I need it.”<sup>630</sup> He listened attentively, and then suddenly “it came and I caught it.”<sup>631</sup> Since then, according to Gifford, Oyedepo has unabashedly proclaimed that, like the prophet Elisha who received Elijah’s “double portion,” Hagin’s “baton has been passed” to him, and for good measure he has received Kenneth Copeland’s anointing as well, because he once slept in a bed that had previously been slept in by Copeland.<sup>632</sup>

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<sup>625</sup> David Oyedepo, *Success Buttons*, (Lagos: Dominion Publishing House, 2005), 9.

<sup>626</sup> David Oyedepo, *Winning The War Against Poverty*, (Lagos, Dominion Publishing House, 2006), 99.

<sup>627</sup> David Oyedepo, *The Unlimited Power Of Faith: Operating in a world of unlimited possibilities*, (Lagos: Dominion Publishing House, 2011), 202.

<sup>628</sup> Oyedepo, *Winning The War Against Poverty*, 30. In this passage Oyedepo encourages his readers to employ the “imagination” of Abraham which enabled the patriarch to see the land that God was granting him and his progeny.

<sup>629</sup> Oyedepo, *The Unlimited Power of Faith*, 290.

<sup>630</sup> Oyedepo, *The Unlimited Power of Faith*.

<sup>631</sup> Oyedepo, *The Unlimited Power of Faith*.

<sup>632</sup> Paul Gifford, “Expecting miracles: the prosperity gospel in Africa,” *Christian Century* 124, no. 14 (2007): 24.

Given his success and the authority he wields among his followers, Oyedepo has become a role model to the pastors in his denomination. All of the pastors who lead the Winners' Chapel churches in Nigeria are Nigerians, as are most of those who pastor the churches in the capital cities of other African countries. They have all attended the denomination's Bible College. Gifford has been to many of these churches, and he has noted some intriguing aspects of the Winners' theology on display. Like most prosperity churches, they lack the crucicentric theology of traditional Christian churches. There is "little reference to suffering, little to sin,"<sup>633</sup> although, as George Folarin points out, Oyedepo preaches that poverty is a sin.<sup>634</sup> Gifford attended Winners' Chapel in Nairobi on Easter Sunday in 2007 and found that there was "no reference to Easter."<sup>635</sup> What Oyedepo does refer to often, however, is a command that he asserts to have received from God, that he was called to make the people of Africa rich.<sup>636</sup>

As he became more confident and assertive of his place in the Nigerian Pentecostal community, Oyedepo made the claim that other religious luminaries of the past, such as Muhammad, Joseph Smith and Kenneth Hagin have also made in similar circumstances, namely that he was a prophet. This occurred in the year 2000, but what was interesting about Oyedepo's assertion is that his claim to prophet status was made to be retroactive to when he began his preaching career in 1981.<sup>637</sup> Prophetic status is important for a variety of reasons to religious leaders, not the least of which is in helping to maintain order and curtail dissent amongst the ranks of one's flock. Lest anyone

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<sup>633</sup> Paul Gifford, "Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Africa: A Response," in *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Africa*, ed. Terrence O. Ranger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 225.

<sup>634</sup> George O. Folarin, "Contemporary State of the Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria," 81.

<sup>635</sup> Paul Gifford, *Christianity, Politics and Public Life in Kenya*, 124.

<sup>636</sup> Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 57.

<sup>637</sup> Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, 90.

question him, Oyedepo is reported to have said on more than one occasion, “The moment you doubt prophetic utterances, you are damned. When you go against the prophet it is actually God you are rising up against.”<sup>638</sup> But prophets also have sterling qualities that are beneficial to their followers. In typical Word of Faith fashion, Oyedepo claims that when God reveals something to him, he, as the prophet, can “pronounce it” and actually bring it about.<sup>639</sup> A similar prophetic trait is Oyedepo’s claim to possess “creative breath” which he utilizes through his prophetic utterances, to assist in miracles of healing, the prevention of death, the creation of wealth, and the selection of a marriage partner.<sup>640</sup> Gifford opines that all of the Winners’ pastors have a florid, repetitive, biblical style and tone, no doubt modeled after Oyedepo, which is quite appealing to the audience, but while biblical in tone, it usually soars “clear of the text itself”<sup>641</sup> into a message of “victory, triumph, blessing, dominion.”<sup>642</sup> The point where the theology of Oyedepo turns into the praxis of his church is even more compelling.

### **The Praxis of Winners’ Chapel**

With regard to praxis, the actions of the ministers and congregants in the Winners’ Chapel churches are quite similar to other successful prosperity gospel denominations in the Global South. There are, however, some noticeable differences. The fact that ministers demand that their parishioners attend services, not just on Sunday, but on Tuesday and Thursday evenings<sup>643</sup> or that they are encouraged to make the pilgrimage to the Winners’ annual conference at the Canaanland headquarters of the

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<sup>638</sup> Gifford, “Expecting miracles,” 22.

<sup>639</sup> Gifford, “Healing in African Pentecostalism,” 261.

<sup>640</sup> Gifford, “Healing in African Pentecostalism.”

<sup>641</sup> Gifford, *Christianity, Politics and Public Life in Kenya*, 187.

<sup>642</sup> Gifford, “Healing in African Pentecostalism,” 253.

<sup>643</sup> Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*, 56.

church,<sup>644</sup> is *de rigueur* for prosperity denominations in the Global South. So too is the pronounced use of anointing oil, which can miraculously bring about such diverse wonders as the return of a lost child, the restoration of a dead car engine, the conception of a child, and the procurement of a husband.<sup>645</sup> And of course the emphasis on regular tithing and special offerings is termed by Gifford as “relentless.”<sup>646</sup>

Winners’ Chapel distinguishes itself in two important elements of praxis, however, from other Global South prosperity churches. The first is that the sermon is not the highlight of the Sunday service. At the end of the sermon and a closing hymn, the Winners’ minister is likely to challenge the audience to receive the particular blessing that was the focus of the message. The pastor will declare the blessing and shout out to the audience to receive it. They in turn will shout back “I receive it!”<sup>647</sup> In a sermon about the importance of boldness, Gifford reports that the congregation were exhorted to roar like lions and shout declarative statements about their boldness and courage.<sup>648</sup> This aspect of the meeting can go on for an hour or more, and the audience leaves the auditorium on a cathartic high from this ritual, which more resembles a Tony Robbins seminar than a Christian worship service.

The second exceptional feature, which seems unique to Winners’ Chapel, is the increasing reference by members of the denomination to the “God of David Oyedepo.” This can occur during prayers or in the testimony portion of a service. Gifford noted that in many services that he has attended, the testimonies about new-found wealth or miraculous healing are tributes to the power of Oyedepo, with only a few referencing

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<sup>644</sup> Gifford, *Christianity, Politics and Public Life in Kenya*, 122.

<sup>645</sup> Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*, 60.

<sup>646</sup> Gifford, “Healing in African Pentecostalism,” 257.

<sup>647</sup> Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*, 59.

<sup>648</sup> Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*.



God. Phrases like “Nothing is impossible for the God of Bishop Oyedepo” pepper such testimonies and confirm that Oyedepo, of all the prosperity gospel ministers in Africa, has moved farthest along the continuum from “Big Man of Africa” to “Big Man of God” to near-deity status.<sup>649</sup>

### **The Significance of David Oyedepo and his Winners’ Chapels**

For the last quarter century, Paul Gifford, more than any other academic, has been doing extensive fieldwork in Africa, studying the impact of contemporary Christianity on public life. From Liberia in the west to Kenya in the east, and including such diverse countries as Ghana, Uganda, Cameroon, and Zambia, he again, more than any other academic, has noted the increasing importance of the burgeoning neo-Pentecostal churches that espouse the prosperity gospel.<sup>650</sup> He says that of this group of churches, in many ways they can no longer even be seen as evangelical, so focused are they on success, victory, and the creation of wealth.<sup>651</sup> According to his research, there are six avenues that such churches utilize to create what he terms “victorious living.”<sup>652</sup>

First, through motivation. A church can inculcate drive and determination, creating success through a positive mental attitude. Second, through entrepreneurship. At an increasing number of churches, at least once every service one must turn to one’s neighbor and ask: “Have you started your own business yet?” Third, through practical life skills---like hard work, budgeting, saving, investing, organizing time, avoiding drink. Fourth, through the “Faith Gospel,” by exercising faith, usually “seed faith” from the biblical metaphor of sowing and reaping, so having faith and giving tithes and offerings to the church become instruments of one’s advancement. Fifth, and increasingly, success and prosperity come through the anointing of the “man of God”; pastors increasingly claim the ability to enhance the prosperity of their followers, and often make themselves

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<sup>649</sup> Gifford, “Healing in African Pentecostalism,” 262.

<sup>650</sup> Gifford, “Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Africa,” 228

<sup>651</sup> Gifford, “Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Africa,” 225.

<sup>652</sup> Gifford, “Healing in African Pentecostalism,” 251.

indispensable. Sixth and related to this last point, the pastor can deliver followers from the evil spirits that impede the progress that is one's due as a Christian.<sup>653</sup>

Winners' Chapel, according to Gifford, combines all of these six avenues seamlessly, whereas many other neo-Pentecostal churches in Africa are associated more with one avenue and less with another.<sup>654</sup> Herein lies one of the reasons for the success of Winners' Chapel, that being its integrated approach to its claim for producing prosperity and a victorious life in all aspects of human endeavour. This message has had considerable appeal wherever Winners' has established churches, and the results are readily apparent to believers. They can worship in impressive, modern buildings, the prime example of which is Faith Tabernacle in Lagos. Their most famous educational institution, Covenant University, has been deemed the best private university in the country since its inception. And their leader, Bishop David Oyedepo, is acknowledged by non-religious sources to be the wealthiest pastor on the continent, something of which the pastor is proud. Winners' Chapel seems like an appropriate name for a denomination run by the most flamboyant and successful prosperity gospel preacher in Africa.

### **Nigerian Responses to the Prosperity Gospel Challenge**

As political scientist Ruth Marshall points out, literally tens of thousands of new prosperity gospel churches sprang up across southern Nigeria during the 1990s, ranging from the international religious conglomerates of Idahosa, Adeboye, and Oyedepo to small, storefront venues and house churches.<sup>655</sup> Everyone in the Nigerian religious scene took notice, be they from the mainline denominations, the African Indigenous Churches, or the Islamic community, because all such groups were losing members to the prosperity

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<sup>653</sup> Gifford, "Healing in African Pentecostalism," 251-52.

<sup>654</sup> Gifford, *Christianity, Politics and Public Life in Kenya*, 152.

<sup>655</sup> Marshall, *Political Spiritualities*, 181.

gospel tidal wave. Some did little, and suffered the consequences in the form of rapidly declining membership; some became more Pentecostal-like within their existing structure by turning charismatic, while others took to more innovative approaches. The most intriguing reaction to the surge of neo-Pentecostalism was provided by a group of young, highly educated and entrepreneurial Muslims from southern Nigeria who, in 1995, formed an organization which they named the Nasrul-Lahi-Fatih Society (NASFAT).<sup>656</sup>

### **The NASFAT Response to the Prosperity Gospel**

According to one of the founders of NASFAT they looked at the successful methodologies employed by prosperity gospel ministers to attract believers “and then we asked ourselves, why can’t we do the same thing?”<sup>657</sup> And so they did. NASFAT began its foray into the religious marketplace by organizing night vigils and prayer camps, very similar to those run by Enoch Adeboye at his Redemption Camp.<sup>658</sup> The prayer vigils have now been permanently scheduled for the first and third Sundays of each month, and they run from midnight to dawn.<sup>659</sup> Other types of religious services are also held on Sundays, because NASFAT wants Muslims to have something to do while Christians are attending church.<sup>660</sup> At the NASFAT gatherings, some of which are held in large tents, just like those of some Pentecostal groups,<sup>661</sup> the participants seamlessly blend *salat*, the traditional form of Muslim prayer, with more spontaneous prayers. The members of NASFAT, who tend to be younger than those found in other Islamic social and charitable

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<sup>656</sup> Afe Adogame, “How God became a Nigerian: Religious impulse and the unfolding of a nation,” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 28, no. 4 (2010): 483. As for the name of the organization, it comes from a verse in chapter eight of the Quran and it translates as “There is no help except from Allah.” See Griswold, *The Tenth Parallel*, 60.

<sup>657</sup> Gregory Obanado, “New Religious Movements in Islam and the Adaptability of Muslims to New Global Realities--Nigeria: A Case in Point,” (NAAS & Affiliates Conference Monographs, 2010), 1515.

<sup>658</sup> Adeboye, “Arrowhead of Nigerian Pentecostalism,” 30.

<sup>659</sup> Obando “New Religious Movements in Islam,” 1514.

<sup>660</sup> Griswold, *The Tenth Parallel*, 61.

<sup>661</sup> Griswold, *The Tenth Parallel*, 33.

groups in Nigeria, have popularized spontaneous Muslim prayer, which can focus on individual needs and general well being, much like their neighbors who attend prosperity gospel churches.<sup>662</sup> They teach that the material benefits prayed for by Christians can be prayed for by Muslims, and that “Allah and the Prophet Muhammad are able to provide all material and spiritual needs.”<sup>663</sup> In keeping with this interpretation of the Quran, NASFAT offers its members schools that provide both religious and secular education. This includes post-secondary education at Fountain University, which was founded in 2007 and, as a private university, competes with prosperity gospel universities such as Oyedepo’s Covenant.<sup>664</sup> This “noticeable stress on material gains” has incurred the ire of Wahhabi groups who have accused NASFAT of innovation while some of the traditional Islamic groups in Nigeria’s north have experienced difficulty in understanding or seeing the need for NASFAT.<sup>665</sup> Among their target group of young, educated Muslims living in the south of Nigeria (the epicentre of the prosperity gospel movement), they have become widely popular. By 2010 more than 1.2 million Nigerians had joined NASFAT, and this membership growth shows no sign of abating.<sup>666</sup> NASFAT has engendered definite pride in being Muslim. This is evidenced by the thousands of bumper stickers that have been pasted on Muslim-driven cars with inscriptions like “Allah is my redeemer,” “Allah is my savior, I am a member of NASFAT,” and “I am a born again Muslim.”<sup>667</sup>

### **More than Charismatic**

In his trailblazing book, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, which focuses on the demographic shift of Christianity from Western

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<sup>662</sup> Obando, “New Religious Movements in Islam,” 1514-1515.

<sup>663</sup> Obando, “New Religious Movements in Islam,” 1516.

<sup>664</sup> Obando, “New Religious Movements in Islam,” 1513.

<sup>665</sup> Obando. “New Religious Movements in Islam,” 1517.

<sup>666</sup> Griswold, *The Tenth Parallel*, 61.

<sup>667</sup> Obando, “New Religious Movements in Islam,” 1517.

Europe and North America to the Global South, Philip Jenkins highlights the case of Nigeria where the Christian percentage of the population rose from 1 percent at the beginning of the twentieth century to 46 percent by the beginning of the new millennium.<sup>668</sup> Of the fifty-one million Christians in Nigeria in the year 2000, the Anglicans (at approximately nineteen million) and the Catholics (at fourteen million) were by far the two largest denominations.<sup>669</sup> A cursory examination of those numbers could lead some to believe that the two mainline denominations are driving the Christian agenda in the country. Nothing could be farther from the truth as the neo-Pentecostal, prosperity gospel churches, most often referred to in Nigeria as the “New Generation” churches, are the acknowledged catalysts for the increasing prominence of Christianity in the public eye.<sup>670</sup>

The reality of the significant influence of these new generation churches is brought home in a recent article by Jesse Zink, an Anglican priest from England who criss-crossed Nigeria to look at the impact of neo-Pentecostalism on the Anglican community in the country. It is his contention that not only has the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) become charismatic, which implies adopting the Pentecostal theology and praxis of classical Pentecostalism, it has also adopted many of the attributes of the “New Generation” or neo-Pentecostal churches, including the prosperity gospel.<sup>671</sup> Furthermore, he states that this situation is true as well for other mainline denominations in the country, and that it is applicable across sub-Saharan Africa, something that is not

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<sup>668</sup> Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 195.

<sup>669</sup> Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*.

<sup>670</sup> Zink, “Anglocostalism in Nigeria,” 3.

<sup>671</sup> Zink, “Anglocostalism in Nigeria,” 2.

readily apparent in *The Next Christendom* or in many other examinations of so-called “evangelical Christianity” in the Global South.

On the matter of the Anglican Communion becoming charismatic in Nigeria, Zink cites several examples, including the replacement of the Anglican prayer book with spontaneous prayers, speaking in tongues, lively music with amplified instruments, and a strong belief in the inerrancy of the Bible.<sup>672</sup> This type of change to charismatic worship has become common place in mainline denominations around the globe for the last half century. What is dramatically different, however, and something that has happened gradually over the last two decades, is an inclusion of many of the accoutrements of the prosperity gospel. Zink referred to a northern diocese that promoted a “4-Day Power-Packed Revival Programme, which promised salvation for the lost soul, recovery of lost glory, deliverance from Satanic oppression, breaking of curses, and business transformation.”<sup>673</sup> At another church he heard a prosperity sermon based on Luke 6:38 and its notable phrase “give and it will be given unto you.”<sup>674</sup> One priest promised that at his week-long revival campaign built around the theme of “Elisha’s Double Portion of Anointing,” participants would be anointed “twice as much” as if they attended any other revival, implying any conducted by his neo-Pentecostal competitors.<sup>675</sup> At yet another church, the priest announced “Offering time” and the congregation replied in unison “Blessing time.”<sup>676</sup> Zink reported that at a service in Eastern Nigeria he witnessed the baptism of three infants whose parents christened them, respectively, in addition to their

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<sup>672</sup> Zink, “Anglocostalism in Nigeria,” 6-12.

<sup>673</sup> Zink, “Anglocostalism in Nigeria,” 12.

<sup>674</sup> Zink, “Anglocostalism in Nigeria,” 13.

<sup>675</sup> Zink, “Anglocostalism in Nigeria,” 15.

<sup>676</sup> Zink, “Anglocostalism in Nigeria,” 13.

Igbo names, Prosper, Destiny and Victory.<sup>677</sup> These and many other examples were provided by Zink to show how thoroughly “the prosperity gospel has taken root among Anglicans in Nigeria.”<sup>678</sup>

Outside of the actual services, Zink noted two other examples of how the prosperity gospel is shaping the Anglican community in Nigeria. The first was pointed out to him by a seminary professor who informed him that the “big men” in society no longer attend the mainline denominations, particularly the Anglican Church. Instead they attend the new generation churches, and with them have gone their tithes.<sup>679</sup> On another day spent with a bishop, Zink learned that the bishop was in favor of enlarging churches in his diocese, and that they must have air conditioning, as well as back-up generators to ensure a constant supply of electricity for the church’s musical instruments. When asked why, the bishop pointed to a new church under construction that they were driving past and replied, “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.”<sup>680</sup> Such is the real world competition among all religious leaders in Nigeria today, and for that matter, much of the Global South. The religious agenda is being driven by the neo-Pentecostal prosperity gospel churches. They are impossible to escape, and one ignores them at one’s peril should one be a mainline pastor, a Catholic Cardinal, or a Muslim cleric.

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<sup>677</sup> Zink, “Anglocostalism in Nigeria,” 14.

<sup>678</sup> Zink, “Anglocostalism in Nigeria,” 14, n52.

<sup>679</sup> Zink, “Anglocostalism in Nigeria,” 17.

<sup>680</sup> Zink, “Anglocostalism in Nigeria,” 17.

## CONCLUSION

When this thesis began, with its focus on the development and spread of the prosperity gospel in the Global South, it was deemed prudent to provide a short history of how the theology developed in the USA, its country of origin. It was never intended to be a comparative study of how the prosperity gospel evolved in North America versus how it advanced in the Global South. Nonetheless, as the research took shape it became apparent that there are noticeable and important differences between the two strands of the prosperity gospel which emerged and they need to be highlighted before any conclusions can be articulated.

### **Theological Differences**

When Kenneth Hagin launched the prosperity gospel, his primary focus was uncovering the logic of positive confession that he implied had been hiding in clear sight in the writings of the Bible for two millennia or more. He would from time to time war with the devil, but his theology centred on how to succeed in claiming health and wealth. In *The Laws of Prosperity*, Kenneth Copeland raises the spectre of Satan, but simply as a now-anemic force. For those who tithe,<sup>681</sup> and those who use “the Word of God,” Satan is a powerless being.<sup>682</sup> As for Joel Osteen, the current epitome of North American televangelism, his “lite” version of the prosperity gospel rarely mentions sin, let alone Satan. The forces of evil, including Satan and all his demons, are, however, central characters in the daily spiritual battles that are waged by most of the prosperity gospel pastors of the Global South. As has been demonstrated earlier, exorcisms are a staple of the UCKG worship, and the denomination leader, Edir Macedo, has actually interrogated

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<sup>681</sup> Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*, 79-80.

<sup>682</sup> Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*, 111.



the devil on television. David Yonggi Cho, in his early days, battled with female shaman in his village, over the right to cast out local demons. In sub-Saharan Africa, the “deliverance ministry” of warring with ancestral spirits, is a key factor in allowing the full benefits of the prosperity gospel to flower.

The important point to be made in comparing the prosperity theology of North America with that of the Global South is not that there are differences between them, but that the differences, in many cases, are regional beliefs that have been fused with the American import to create a theology that fits the locale. For example, the Prayer Mountain of the Yoido Full Gospel Church plays well in Korea, and it might also do the same at some future point in China where holy mountains have been a focal point of Taoist and Buddhist pilgrimages for thousands of years.<sup>683</sup> A sacred mountain for prayer, however, might not be an idea that gains traction in Tulsa, the home base of prosperity gospel pioneers Kenneth Hagin, Oral Roberts and T.L. Osborne. Enoch Adeboye, the General Overseer of the RCCG, provides another example of incorporating the local into the prosperity gospel. He has taken the Yoruba art form of praise singing, *oriki*, and incorporated it in the first fifteen minutes of the services he leads.<sup>684</sup> In its traditional usage, *oriki* consists of praise prayer to the local deities, and what Adeboye has done is replace the name of the Yoruba *orisa* with Christian and Judaic praise names for God. Ukah points out that when he began his ministry, Adeboye was fiercely opposed to some aspects of local culture, considering them not to be Christian, but as the RCCG has matured, he now confidently takes certain aspects of Yoruba culture, such as stories and

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<sup>683</sup> For an insightful example of how other Christian denominations have created sacred mountains in Asia see Jean DeBernardi, “Wudang Mountain and Mount Zion in Taiwan: Syncretic Process in Space, Ritual Performance, and Imagination,” *Asian Journal of Social Science* 37 (2009): 138-162.

<sup>684</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*,” 323-25.

speech forms, and provides a platform for them throughout his international denomination.<sup>685</sup>

### **Churches versus Denominations**

Another significant difference between the prosperity gospel as it developed in North America, and how it has evolved in the Global South concerns the concept of independent, stand-alone churches versus denominations. In her recent history of the prosperity gospel in the United States, Kate Bowler has compiled an appendix that lists the 115 prosperity gospel megachurches in the United States.<sup>686</sup> To qualify as a megachurch, the self-reported attendance must be over two thousand per weekly Sunday service. Combined, these churches attract 986,000 worshippers per week. These are impressive numbers, particularly when compared to the churches of mainline denominations operating in the same US cities. The US numbers pale, however, when compared to church attendance in the Global South. Consider the more than seven hundred thousand members of the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, or the more than fifty thousand worshippers who show up to each of four services on Sunday at Faith Tabernacle in Lagos.

The comparison between North American and Global South prosperity gospel adherents should be focused on the fact that megachurches in the United States are stand-alone operations, not part of a denomination, while for the most part in the Global South the prosperity gospel is found in large, expansive denominations that have been launched over the past four decades. These denominations have, in many cases, spilled over the borders of their country of origin, and because of aggressive evangelization have become

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<sup>685</sup> Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*,” 325.

<sup>686</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 239-48.

international in scope, with congregations in dozens of countries. In doing so, they have created a much larger national and global footprint than have any of the US prosperity gospel megachurches.

### **The Pace of the Prosperity Gospel**

When the prosperity gospel emerged forty years ago as a viable new theology, it quickly garnered support and rapidly spread along the international Pentecostal networks, as first observed and written about by Coleman. As a driving force in Pentecostalism its growth seems to have plateaued in North America, but it is not losing the worshippers it has attracted. In the Global South the prosperity gospel seems to be a still-expanding force. While some particular churches may have stopped growing, like the Yoido Full Gospel Church, the prosperity gospel is still attracting new adherents in Korea by crossing over into the Protestant charismatic community. This is evidenced by the 2004 creation of the prosperity-centric Heavenly Touch Ministry, by the respected Presbyterian Elder and scientist, Ki-Cheol Son.<sup>687</sup> In Brazil the UCKG has suffered a decline in membership during the last few years, while it continues to expand abroad. The losses at home however, are to more attractive alternatives of the prosperity gospel in the guise of neo-Pentecostal denominations, such as Valdemiro Santiago's World Church of the Power of God, and Silas Malafaia's Assembly of God-Victory in Christ Church. The phenomenon of the prosperity gospel seeping into the charismatic segment of Pentecostalism is a development that has happened across the Pentecostal world. Kate Bowler points out that, in the United States, "some of the mainline denominations'

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<sup>687</sup> Sung-Gun Kim, "The Heavenly Touch Ministry in the Age of Millennial Capitalism: A Phenomenological Perspective," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 15, no. 3 (2012): 51.

largest congregations are now espousing the prosperity gospel in some form.”<sup>688</sup> This would include a favorite pastor of both George W. Bush and Barrack Obama, Kirbyjon Caldwell of the Windsor Village United Methodist Church, in Houston, “who claims that it is unscriptural to not own land.”<sup>689</sup> This same gradual infiltration of mainline denominations and classical Pentecostal denominations has been going on in the Global South for decades; such is the seemingly inexorable power of the prosperity gospel. The prime example of the invasive quality of the prosperity gospel in classical Pentecostalism is in the ministry of David Yonggi Cho, whose embrace of the theology brought considerable angst to the Assemblies of God, in both Korea and the United States. The prosperity gospel has, however, penetrated many Assemblies of God churches across the Global South, such as the Calvary Charismatic Church in Kumasi, Ghana.<sup>690</sup> For the role of the prosperity gospel in the historic mission churches, Jessie Zink’s article on the prosperity gospel’s twenty-year advance into the Anglican Communion of Nigeria is a telling and salient commentary.<sup>691</sup>

### **Pentecostalism and Pluralism**

A continual theme in the writings of David Martin over the last quarter century has been his observation that Pentecostalism expands in the face of pluralism.<sup>692</sup> It is Martin’s contention that as pluralism emerged from within Latin American culture in the

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<sup>688</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 260.

<sup>689</sup> Van Biema and Chu, “Does God Want You To Be Rich?” *Time* 168, no. 12 (2006): 5.

<sup>690</sup> In a 1995 article, Rosalind Hackett identified the Calvary Charismatic Church in Kumasi, Ghana, an Assemblies of God church, as being one of the “noted prosperity churches in Ghana.” See Rosalind Hackett, “The Gospel of Prosperity in West Africa,” in *Religion & The Transformation of Capitalism*, ed. Richard H. Roberts, (London: Routledge, 1995), 203. In 2013, the Calvary Charismatic Church had a strong web presence and was still proclaiming a fervent prosperity gospel message. For example, the church theme for the year was, “My Year of Increase: 2013,” and a recent guest pastor was the prominent prosperity televangelist, Morris Cerullo, who on October 22, 2013, led a special “night of impartation,” accessed December 2, 2013, <http://cccghana.com/pages/index.php>.

<sup>691</sup> Zink, “Anglocostalism in Nigeria,” 231-250.

<sup>692</sup> David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory*, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005), 21-22.

second half of the twentieth century, Pentecostalism moved in and set off a process of personal social reform that increased the dignity of women and supported nuclear family life. As pluralism opened up new religious space in parts of Asia, such as Korea, and in sub-Saharan Africa, Pentecostalism found a favorable environment in emerging nations across the Global South.<sup>693</sup> Martin's observation is certainly accurate, and as political changes in the last two decades have brought increased pluralism to formerly restricted areas of the world, Pentecostalism has again shown its remarkable ability to occupy new social and religious space. What is different about the latest round of Pentecostal expansion, however, is that it is now being led by the supremely confident adherents of the prosperity gospel, rather than the more tempered evangelizers found in classical Pentecostalism. One example of this trend can be seen in Southern Africa after the demise of apartheid in South Africa, but even more strongly in the aftermath of the civil wars that followed the overthrow of Portuguese colonialism in Mozambique and Angola. The UCKG was quick to establish itself as a major religious force in all three locales, aided in no small part by its massive television network and its investment in local broadcasting.<sup>694</sup> But what is even more astonishing was the ability of other prosperity gospel churches from Brazil, such as the God is Love Pentecostal Church, to establish footholds across Southern Africa, particularly in Lusophone countries.<sup>695</sup>

Another example of the prosperity gospel's ability to rapidly populate an emerging, pluralistic religious space took place, not in the Global South, but in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, after the fall of communism. Ironically, the Word of Life church in Uppsala, Sweden, which Simon Coleman began studying around the

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<sup>693</sup> Martin, *On Secularization*, 23.

<sup>694</sup> Freston, "The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God," 56-60.

<sup>695</sup> Van De Kamp, "Converting the Spirit Spouse," 516.

time of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, offers an insightful example of this capacity. From its launch in 1983 until 2009, the Uppsala church grew from twenty-five people to thirty-three hundred, and its Bible School graduated approximately ten thousand students.<sup>696</sup> Strongly emphasizing international missions, the Word of Life rejected the traditional mission fields of the Global South, and instead focused on the former Soviet Union, East and Central Europe, and Central Asia, building up a network of fifteen hundred churches in the former Soviet bloc.<sup>697</sup> This includes some rather large Word of Life churches, such as the ten thousand-member congregation in Yerevan, Armenia; the five thousand-member church in Donetsk, Ukraine; and the four thousand members of the Moscow Word of Life church.<sup>698</sup> It goes without saying that other dedicated missionary groups such as classical Pentecostals, the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Seventh Day Adventists have all recently evangelized in this part of the world, but none have had the success of the Word of Life or similar prosperity gospel churches.<sup>699</sup> With regard to new geographical openings for Pentecostalism, and the prosperity gospel in particular, the prospect of a potential mission field in China has evangelizing pulses racing, particularly since a largely homegrown Pentecostal movement has already established a strong foothold in the country. Time will tell if the prosperity gospel will resonate in the homeland of the Tao.

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<sup>696</sup> Torbjorn Aronson, "Continuity in Charismata: Swedish Mission and the Growth of neo-Pentecostal Churches in Russia," *Religion in Eastern Europe* 31, no. 1 (2011): 35.

<sup>697</sup> Aronson, "Continuity in Charismata," 36.

<sup>698</sup> Aronson, "Continuity in Charismata," 37.

<sup>699</sup> Aronson, "Continuity in Charismata."

## **Attracting More than the Aspiring Poor**

As one of the first academics to write about the spread of Pentecostalism, David Martin, saw this offspring of Methodism working as a “self-help”<sup>700</sup> vehicle, “among the aspiring poor,”<sup>701</sup> and as a “collective raft pointed with determination towards modernity.”<sup>702</sup> As we have seen in this thesis, “the aspiring poor” certainly describes the members of the El Shaddai movement in the Philippines, or some of the members of the prosperity gospel churches of sub-Saharan Africa or Latin America, as it does with much of the classical Pentecostal world. But there is also ample evidence that the prosperity gospel is attracting believers who have already attained middle-class status, such as the congregation of the Yoido Full Gospel Church,<sup>703</sup> or the members of the Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship International, be they residents of Indonesia, Nigeria, or Guatemala. Supporting this assertion is the research conducted by Finnish anthropologist Paivi Hasu, who studied the ministry of a Tanzanian prosperity gospel evangelist, Christopher Mwakasege. Mwakasege works primarily among Lutherans in the major cities of the country, such as Dar es Salaam, Arusha, and Dodoma.<sup>704</sup> What Hasu discovered was that the crowds of fifteen to thirty thousand who attended Mwakasege’s “crusades” were composed of the poor, (as expected), but also by a par-venue minority who have benefited from the economic strategies espoused by the World Bank and adopted by many countries in the Global South. Hasu described the scenes he witnessed

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<sup>700</sup> Martin, “On Secularization,” 73.

<sup>701</sup> Martin, “On Secularization.”

<sup>702</sup> Martin, “Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish,” 152.

<sup>703</sup> Sung-Gun Kim has observed that the prosperity gospel in Korea today is a distinctly middle class phenomenon which represents the “self centred materialism of contemporary Christianity,” a Christianity which in Korea is found among classical Pentecostals, Presbyterians and other Protestant denominations. See Sung-Gun Kim, “The Heavenly Touch Ministry in the Age of Millennial Capitalism,” 53.

<sup>704</sup> Paivi Hasu, “World Bank & Heavenly Bank in Poverty & Prosperity: The Case of Tanzanian Faith Gospel,” *Review of African Political Economy* 33, no. 110, (2006): 682.

across the country as “a paradoxical situation,” where the nouveaux riche “who have profited turn to religion for approval and justification, while those who remain poor also refer to God to rescue their aspirations and hope.”<sup>705</sup>

### **The Unfulfilled Promises of the Prosperity Gospel**

In outlining his case for conspiracy, money laundering, and undeclared international cash against Bishop Edir Macedo, Sao Paulo state prosecutor Silvio Luis Martins de Oliveira stated that the preachers of the UCKG “make use of the faith, desperation, or ambition of their followers to sell the idea that God and Jesus Christ only look upon those who contribute financially to the church.”<sup>706</sup> According to reporter Cuadros, the prosecutor described the ongoing situation in Brazil where “the Universal Church enriches its leaders far more than its faithful.”<sup>707</sup> Similar comments are made regularly across the prosperity gospel world by outraged theologians who do not subscribe to the theology, as well as by disgruntled former members of the movement, along with those not directly involved with the theology such as journalists and academics. One such academic is Paul Gifford, who posits that there is an unresolved tension among prosperity gospel churches because so many congregants “do not, indeed cannot, succeed.”<sup>708</sup> This issue is rarely, if ever, discussed in prosperity gospel churches, but Gifford did hear one pastor from the Winners’ Chapel in Nairobi explain in a 2006 New Year’s Eve service that those worshippers who may not have been pleased with

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<sup>705</sup> Hasu, “World Bank & Heavenly Bank in Poverty & Prosperity,” 681.

<sup>706</sup> Cuadros, “Edir Macedo, Brazil’s Billionaire Bishop.”

<sup>707</sup> Cuadros, “Edir Macedo, Brazil’s Billionaire Bishop.”

<sup>708</sup> Gifford, “Healing in African Pentecostalism,” 264.



their progress in the past year should be happy that they are still alive, and they should remember that Jesus “makes all things beautiful in his time.”<sup>709</sup>

Generally, however, prosperity gospel ministers tell their congregations that if their prayers have not been answered, the root problem is with the believer.<sup>710</sup> In the face of little or no progress, some of the poorest practitioners of the theology have developed some unique coping strategies. Anthropologist Naomi Haynes, who has recently conducted ethnographic research among workers and their families employed in Zambia’s copper mining industry, states that her informants have resorted to “theological nuancing” in dealing with the shortfalls of the prosperity gospel.<sup>711</sup> The nuances utilized include redefining prosperity to allow the giving of seed faith offerings exclusively to ministers who would be able to provide ancillary benefits to the donors, such as an enhanced social life.<sup>712</sup> Katherine Wiegele witnessed something similar to “theological nuancing” in the Philippines, where El Shaddai adherents, whose impoverished lives never changed despite applying the theology, created a “radical recasting of identity,” to the point that they no longer saw themselves as poor, but as “a church of the self-identified rich,” “rich” meaning “rich in spirit.”<sup>713</sup>

Pastors are aware, however, that at least at some level, the prosperity gospel is not working for all of their followers. To this end, medical sociologist Eric Shaw studied an American prosperity gospel church and determined that church leaders utilized four

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<sup>709</sup> Gifford, “Expecting miracles,” 24.

<sup>710</sup> David Oyedepo provides several reasons for a believer’s lack of progress including not following the correct pattern of “programmed efforts.” According to Oyedepo the best way to overcome such issues is to follow the lead of Biblical figures such as Solomon, Noah and Abraham, who when their progress was blocked, accelerated their sacrifices to God. So apparently one should give more! See Oyedepo, *Understanding Financial Prosperity*, 357-61.

<sup>711</sup> Naomi Haynes, “On the Potential and Problems of Pentecostal Exchange,” *American Anthropologist* 115, no. 1 (2013): 87, DOI: 10.1111/j.1548-1433.2012.01537.x.

<sup>712</sup> Haynes, “On the Potential and Problems of Pentecostal Exchange.”

<sup>713</sup> Wiegele, *Investing In Miracles*, 173.

techniques to reduce the cognitive dissonance of their parishioners and to “anchor their spiritual frame.”<sup>714</sup> The first practice consisted of staging an hour-long praise and worship session that features vibrant music to produce “orchestrated emotionality” and “surface acting” from the congregants, which makes them more compliant with prompts from the minister to, for example, tithe or make donations.<sup>715</sup> The second step, described by his informants, was the fact that “a loving and influential relationship formed between the pastor and congregant even though there is virtually no face-to-face interaction.”<sup>716</sup> The third technique Shaw witnessed was dramatic testimonies corroborating the prosperity gospel narrative given by successful congregants. He characterized these descriptions of-more-often-than-not random events, such as finding a cherished item on sale, as the equivalent of the bells and sirens that casinos trigger when a gambler wins a major jackpot.<sup>717</sup> Listening to a fellow believer who has “won” reinforces the basic prosperity gospel message. His final observation was that ministers interpret scriptures to fit the prosperity gospel, such as declaring Jesus to be a wealthy minister who travelled a lot, rather than a poor, itinerant carpenter.<sup>718</sup> According to Shaw, once believers accept the prosperity interpretation of a passage of scripture, cognitive dissonance theory suggests they will close themselves off to any alternative information that might change their mind.<sup>719</sup> With these four techniques in play at the prosperity gospel church he studied, Shaw concluded that congregants who found the prosperity message appealing

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<sup>714</sup> Eric K. Shaw, “Pennies From Heaven: An Integration of Cognitive Dissonance and Spiritual Frames in a Prosperity Church,” *Sociological Focus* 34, no. 2 (2001): 220.

<sup>715</sup> Shaw, “Pennies From Heaven,” 221.

<sup>716</sup> Shaw, “Pennies From Heaven.”

<sup>717</sup> Shaw, “Pennies From Heaven,” 223.

<sup>718</sup> Shaw, “Pennies From Heaven.”

<sup>719</sup> Shaw, “Pennies From Heaven,” 224.

then “became part of an ongoing production to make this message work.”<sup>720</sup> Without belaboring the point, the four techniques described by Shaw can be seen in all the prosperity gospel ministries that have been outlined in this thesis, be they in the Western World or the Global South. Even though Shaw’s study suggests that prosperity gospel ministers and their congregants act as collaborators to validate the theology, Gifford makes the point that the “tension” he observed from the failings of the prosperity message are in part responsible for the thousands of worshippers who migrate from church to church looking for a more suitable spiritual home.<sup>721</sup>

### **Two Perspectives on the Success of the Prosperity Gospel**

That the prosperity gospel is finding immense traction in the Global South, and that it is one of the principal driving forces behind the rapid growth of Pentecostalism across the globe, seems beyond dispute. Why it is succeeding is, however, a matter of considerable debate. There are two theories, a “hegemonic” model and a “glocal” model, that have emerged to explain the advancement of the prosperity gospel in the Global South.

In the hegemonic camp are those who often use a Marxist framework, wherein the countries of the Global South “are subject to the power and influence of the western industrialized nations—culturally, economically and politically.”<sup>722</sup> As it applies to the specifics of this thesis, the hegemonic model “argues that the spread of the prosperity gospel is indicative of an imposition of American consumerist and moral values.”<sup>723</sup>

Representative of this school of thought is Rosalind Hackett, who argues that there is a

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<sup>720</sup> Shaw, “Pennies From Heaven,” 227.

<sup>721</sup> Gifford, “Healing in African Pentecostalism,” 264.

<sup>722</sup> Stephen Hunt, “Winning ways: globalisation and the impact of the health and wealth gospel,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 15, no. 3 (2000), 333.

<sup>723</sup> G. Cristina Mora, “Marketing the ‘health and wealth gospel’ across national borders from Brazil and the United States.” *Poetics* 36, (2008), 406.

close affinity between the prosperity gospel and “global, particularly Western, capitalist forces.”<sup>724</sup> Because Benson Idahosa studied in the US for a few months, and counted as his mentors such prosperity gospel pioneers as Gordon Lindsay, Jim Bakker, and Oral Roberts, Hackett feels comfortable in describing Idahosa’s ministry as evidence of “spiritual neo-colonialism.”<sup>725</sup> But Stephen Hunt argues that such characterizations which are typical of the hegemonic model are “too simplistic,” “too general and unsophisticated.”<sup>726</sup> The hegemonic model for the prosperity gospel, which was first espoused in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, still has its supporters, but it has largely been replaced, particularly by anthropologists such as Coleman and Robbins, with a “glocalisation” model.<sup>727</sup> With this approach scholars acknowledge that the prosperity gospel has its roots in the United States, but that the religious leaders who espouse the theology in the Global South heavily utilize local traditions and institutions to develop their particular message.<sup>728</sup> Nowhere is this alternative model more applicable than in the astonishing Global South growth of the UCKG, and the many other smaller, but strong, prosperity gospel denominations of Brazil that thrive not only in their country of origin, but across Latin America and particularly in Portugal and the five Lusophone countries of Africa. These denominations have little to do with the prosperity gospel notables of the United States. Instead they have created their own sphere of influence which is primarily located in the southern hemisphere. Here they compete fiercely among themselves, essentially oblivious to the cultural forces of America that supposedly drive

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<sup>724</sup> Hackett, “The Gospel of Prosperity in West Africa,” 199.

<sup>725</sup> Hackett, “The Gospel of Prosperity in West Africa,” 202.

<sup>726</sup> Hunt, “Winning Ways,” 343.

<sup>727</sup> Hunt, “Winning Ways,” 335.

<sup>728</sup> Mora, “Marketing the ‘health and wealth gospel’ across national borders from Brazil and the United States,” 406.

the hegemonic model. These churches would probably be both surprised and insulted to learn that the United States has any sort of hegemony in spiritual matters.

### **The Anomaly that is Singapore**

Since the beginning of his writings about Pentecostalism, David Martin has meticulously painted a portrait of the social niches he sees as receptive to the movement. It includes the “respectable poor” of the Global South seeking to enter the modern world.<sup>729</sup> It can also contain some members of the new middle classes of the same region, as well as certain ethnic minorities who have little influence with their nation states.<sup>730</sup> In addition, Pentecostalism seems to take root among migrants who have moved from the countryside to large metropolitan areas.<sup>731</sup> This description accurately characterizes the first wave of Pentecostalism, that being classical Pentecostals. In short, Pentecostals are economically marginalized people who are attempting to change their lot with the help of religion. This characterization tends to break down, however, when trying to categorize the second and third waves of Pentecostalism, those being the charismatics from mainline denominations and the neo-Pentecostals, who are usually regarded to be better educated and, correspondingly, less poor than classical Pentecostals.<sup>732</sup>

Martin’s portrait of Pentecostals is certainly challenged by the religious changes that have taken place in the island nation of Singapore during the last few decades. Since it became an independent country in 1965, Singapore has transformed itself from a corrupt, underdeveloped island, into an economic powerhouse, and a bastion of transparency and ethical behavior. It now has the third highest per capita GDP in the

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<sup>729</sup> Martin, “Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish,” xvii.

<sup>730</sup> Martin, “Pentecostalism.”

<sup>731</sup> Martin, “On Secularization,” 73.

<sup>732</sup> One scholar who has pointed out the noticeable higher socioeconomic status of charismatics and neo-Pentecostals is Joel Robbins in, “The Globalization of Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity,” 122.

world, at \$56,700, trailing only oil-rich Qatar and banking-haven Luxembourg in this category.<sup>733</sup> It is seen as a peaceful, egalitarian, multi-racial society, which possesses a Confucian work ethic because of its ethnic Chinese majority population.<sup>734</sup> Given the wealth and opulence of the city, one would hardly expect to find a growing Pentecostal presence, but that is precisely what has happened, particularly in the last twenty years. Because of the cosmopolitan mix of Singapore, along with its British colonial heritage, there has always been an abundance of religious options, which include Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, and Christianity. In the last few decades, however, Christianity has grown, largely at the expense of Buddhism and Taoism, and some new prosperity gospel megachurches, such as City Harvest Church and New Creation Church, (see figure 14)<sup>735</sup> have been the beneficiaries of this trend.<sup>736</sup> Both churches have congregations that exceed twenty thousand members, and they also claim affiliate churches in neighbouring countries, such as, in the case of City Harvest, Malaysia, India, Indonesia, Taiwan, and Brunei.<sup>737</sup> Both churches are led by dynamic, youthful ministers of ethnic Chinese origin, and their congregants are largely from the Chinese community.

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<sup>733</sup> “Forbes ranks Singapore as 3<sup>rd</sup> richest nation,” *The China Post*, February 27, 2012,

<http://www.chinapost.com.tw/business/asia/asian-market/2012/02/27/332852/Forbes-ranks.htm>.

<sup>734</sup> According to the Singapore Ministry of Health, in 2012, the ethnic origin of the nation’s 5.3 million citizens was 74 percent Chinese, 13 percent Malay, 9 percent Indian and 4 percent “other.” “Population and Vital Statistics,” Ministry of Health, Singapore, accessed December 15, 2013,

[http://www.moh.gov.sg/content/moh\\_web/home/statistics/Health\\_Facts\\_Singapore/Population\\_And\\_Vital\\_Statistics.html](http://www.moh.gov.sg/content/moh_web/home/statistics/Health_Facts_Singapore/Population_And_Vital_Statistics.html).

<sup>735</sup> Figure 14. The four photos below capture different aspects of the New Creation Church in Singapore, one of the most modern prosperity gospel churches in the world. Upper left, <http://sammyboy.com/showthread.php?112851-New-venue-for-New-Creation-Church-Soon!>, upper right, <http://www.architectmagazine.com/retail-projects/the-star.aspx>, lower right, <http://www.proaudio-central.com/articles/worship/The-Creation-of-the-Star>, lower left, <http://eytanuliel.com/2013/04/02/resurrection-day/>.

<sup>736</sup> Sharon Chen, “Singapore Mega-Church Christian Faithful Invest in Malls,” *Bloomberg*, September 4, 2012, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-09-03/singapore-mega-church-faithful-invest-in-malls-southeast-asia.html>.

<sup>737</sup> Chen, “Singapore Mega-Church Christian Faithful Invest in Malls.”



**Figure 14:** *New Creation Church, Singapore.*

These churches and their members do not measure up to Martin's stereotypical Pentecostal on several counts. The members are for the most part affluent, well educated, and belong to the dominant ethnic group of the country. They are also from families who have lived in Singapore for several generations, and they are in no way part of a migrant community. In no sense of the word could they be portrayed as marginalized, as was the case described earlier with the socially marginalized, but wealthy, ethnic Chinese community in neighbouring Malaysia and Indonesia. Why then have such large numbers of this non-marginalized community turned to a prosperity gospel-centric brand of Pentecostalism? For a possible answer to this question, it is most helpful to turn to an intriguing line of thought proposed by Gerard Jacobs.

## The Jacobs Thesis

Gerard Jacobs grew up in Singapore where, as a teenager, he was introduced to what he terms as “Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity.”<sup>738</sup> His book describes the type of Pentecostalism that he says has developed in the megachurches of Singapore, such as City Harvest Church and New Creation Church.<sup>739</sup> Jacobs builds a case that the reason for the success of the gospel of health and wealth in Singapore is that it resonates with the amalgam of long-standing religions: Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and folk religion, which comprise a significant part of Chinese culture.<sup>740</sup> For example, Jacobs notes that the type of Buddhism which has evolved in Chinese Buddhist communities in the cities of Southeast Asia consists of “ceremonies for the welfare of ancestors, and for prosperity and wealth for the living.”<sup>741</sup> The lay community will often consult Buddhist oracles who speak through mediums in trance-like states to address quotidian issues concerning the health and well-being of devotees.<sup>742</sup> Jacobs contends that the Chinese religious world view is centred on “manipulating transcendence for personal security and well-being.”<sup>743</sup> Furthermore, he points to the centuries-old, pragmatic Chinese practice of borrowing seemingly efficacious practices from foreign religions.<sup>744</sup>

When this world view and set of religious practices encounters prosperity gospel Pentecostalism, the ethnic Chinese religionist of Singapore sees a foreign religious

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<sup>738</sup> Gerard Jacobs, *The Pursuit & Acquisition of Health & Wealth: A Theological Critique of a Cultural Influence on Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in a Contemporary Singaporean Context* (Bloomington: WestBow Press, 2006), xi. Jacobs states that he has been following the movement since the 1970s with keen interest, both in Singapore and now from his current post, as an Anglican parish priest in Christchurch, New Zealand. He further comments that all of the churches that he has been a part of in Singapore and New Zealand have been comprised predominantly of ethnic Chinese members.

<sup>739</sup> Jacobs, *The Pursuit & Acquisition of Health & Wealth*, 71 and 63.

<sup>740</sup> Jacobs, *The Pursuit & Acquisition of Health & Wealth*, 21.

<sup>741</sup> Jacobs, *The Pursuit & Acquisition of Health & Wealth*, 9.

<sup>742</sup> Jacobs, *The Pursuit & Acquisition of Health & Wealth*.

<sup>743</sup> Jacobs, *The Pursuit & Acquisition of Health & Wealth*, 77.

<sup>744</sup> Jacobs, *The Pursuit & Acquisition of Health & Wealth*, 57.



tradition which is led by a modern, appealing, larger-than-life, minister, who claims to possess “supernatural enablement” over life’s problems because of his special relationship with the Holy Spirit.<sup>745</sup> The Chinese religionist is familiar with these types of claims because they are often made by charismatic monks or by the shamans of folk religion, a practice which Jacobs says is followed by 60 percent of the Chinese population.<sup>746</sup> The most important ingredient in the claims of these religious leaders, be they shamans, monks, or prosperity preachers, are their “signs and wonders,” or other observable forms of power.<sup>747</sup> The evidence of power and success for the prosperity gospel preacher in Singapore consists of spectacular, ultra modern, church edifices, with large memberships, triumphant testimonies of the accomplishments of devotees (heard at church services or viewed on church websites), and the lavish lifestyle of the pastor and his family.<sup>748</sup> All of this can constitute proof of higher spirituality, greater faith, and God’s favor of the leader, particularly to the devotee who grew up with the worldview of ethnic Chinese of Singapore.

To Jacobs, the result of this syncretic blend of Chinese and Pentecostal belief systems produces “an untransformed Chinese worldview within a Christian matrix.”<sup>749</sup> Consequently, Jacobs concludes that a “Christo-pagan” type of religion, which could end up being not much different than animism, may be evolving in Singapore.<sup>750</sup>

### **The Significance of Jacobs’ Analysis**

In thoroughly outlining how the megachurch Pentecostalism of Singapore resonates with the Chinese world view, Jacobs has unknowingly provided a most

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<sup>745</sup> Jacobs, *The Pursuit & Acquisition of Health & Wealth*, 60.

<sup>746</sup> Jacobs, *The Pursuit & Acquisition of Health & Wealth*, 61-62.

<sup>747</sup> Jacobs, *The Pursuit & Acquisition of Health & Wealth*, 73.

<sup>748</sup> Jacobs, *The Pursuit & Acquisition of Health & Wealth*.

<sup>749</sup> Jacobs, *The Pursuit & Acquisition of Health & Wealth*, 58.

<sup>750</sup> Jacobs, *The Pursuit & Acquisition of Health & Wealth*, 81.

plausible explanation for the widespread popularity of the prosperity gospel in the Global South. Jacobs was writing exclusively about Singaporean neo-Pentecostalism, but his ideas seem to have a much wider application. To show how his ideas apply, however, it is essential to backtrack a step and examine one of the major reasons that academics and theologians offer for the success of Pentecostalism in the Global South.

For those analysts who look beyond the narrow bounds of sociology, one of the most significant reasons for the acceptance of Pentecostalism is that it has championed “primal spirituality.”<sup>751</sup> According to Harvey Cox, across the Global South, in countries as diverse as Columbia, Zimbabwe and Korea, Pentecostalism has reclaimed “powerful features of folk religions and mystical motifs.”<sup>752</sup> In locales such as these Philip Jenkins observes that fundamental animistic beliefs have been retained, causing twenty-first century denizens to still believe in the spirit world and to fear the impact of the angry and bitter ghosts of ancestors and other malevolent forces such as witches, wizards and sorcerers.<sup>753</sup> While mainline Christian churches may not acknowledge this spiritual realm, Pentecostalism not only acknowledges it, but, through the dynamism of the Holy Spirit, offers protection from and power over the evil forces of this domain. That Pentecostalism thrives in surroundings where animistic and folk religious practices survive is an accepted element of Pentecostal studies.<sup>754</sup> Why then could this same connection not be made between the acceptance of the prosperity gospel and communities where animistic world views still prevail? Jacobs has made this connection in Singapore, but does it apply elsewhere?

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<sup>751</sup> Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, 81.

<sup>752</sup> Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, 206.

<sup>753</sup> Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity*, 102-03.

<sup>754</sup> Martin, *Pentecostalism*, 142.

## Extending the Analysis of Jacobs to Asia, Africa, and Latin America

In his article examining the rise of the popular Korean Presbyterian prosperity gospel minister Elder Ki-Cheol Son, sociologist Sung-Gun Kim links the success of Elder Son and of David Yonggi Cho to the “strong legacy of Asia’s prosperity religions (Shamanism and Taoism).”<sup>755</sup> The influence of shamanism has also produced in Korea what Kim terms as a “prosperity-oriented secular Korean shamanism” which impacts the Korean middle-class be they Christian or non-Christian.<sup>756</sup> Another scholar, Andrew Eungi Kim, writes of “Shamanism’s singular emphasis on material successes as the supreme goal of its belief,” and emphasizes that shamanism to this day is the “enduring core of Korean religious and cultural thought.”<sup>757</sup> Andrew Eungi Kim also pointed out that in Korea, because of the strength of shamanism, the Buddhas of the Mahayana tradition that have wide appeal are from the “wish granting” genre.<sup>758</sup> It is hardly surprising that in such a cultural milieu the prosperity gospel would find a welcoming audience. In fact, what Methodist Bishop Hwa Yung states is that what David Yonggi Cho has done, with his emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit and three-fold blessing theology, is to provide a “functional substitute” for shamanistic power.<sup>759</sup>

In traditional African societies it was axiomatic for devotees of local religions to look to the deities for prosperity and good fortune.<sup>760</sup> The Yoruba, for example, have a phrase that they used to address Obatala, the creator god. “*O gbe omo re, o soo daje*” translates as “he stands by his children and makes them materially prosperous.”<sup>761</sup>

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<sup>755</sup> Kim, “The Heavenly Touch Ministry in the Age of Millennial Capitalism,” 58.

<sup>756</sup> Kim, “The Heavenly Touch Ministry in the Age of Millennial Capitalism,” 53.

<sup>757</sup> Kim, “Christianity, Shamanism, and Modernization in South Korea,” 115-16.

<sup>758</sup> Kim, “Characteristics of Religious Life in South Korea,” 296.

<sup>759</sup> Yung, “The Missiological Challenge of David Yonggi Cho’s Theology,” 76.

<sup>760</sup> Hackett, “The Gospel of Prosperity in West Africa,” 208.

<sup>761</sup> Hackett, “The Gospel of Prosperity in West Africa.”

Gifford has noted that in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa, religion has traditionally been “this-worldly,” concerned with “flocks, crops, fertility, spouses, children, animals.”<sup>762</sup> As a result there has been a corresponding lack of eschatology in African religions; something which Gifford points out was mentioned decades ago in E.E. Evans-Pritchard’s classic study of the Nuer of Sudan. It is this world view which Gifford says “has persisted into contemporary African Pentecostalism,” making it a veritable seedbed for the prosperity gospel.<sup>763</sup> Anthropologist Sasha Newell pointed out in his study of religion in the Ivory Coast that there is a “local cosmology of success” which has created “an intersection between Ivorian Pentecostalism and witchcraft beliefs.”<sup>764</sup> Newell specifically studied the ministry of the UCKG in Abidjan, because unlike the many Nigerian and Ghanaian Pentecostal denominations operating in the capital city, the Brazilian church conducted services exclusively in the French language. He found that the UCKG’s version of “prosperity fits well with an understanding of deities that will reward you with material wealth should you fulfill the proper obligations to the deity.”<sup>765</sup> He concludes that the Pentecostalism espoused by the UCKG and other prosperity gospel denominations “is quickly replacing other forms of Christianity in Cote d’Ivoire because it at once fits pre-existing religious beliefs about efficacy against witchcraft and access to material prosperity, neither of which mainstream Catholicism and Protestantism have much to say about.”<sup>766</sup> What Newell observed in the Ivory Coast, Gifford saw across the continent in Kenya in a slightly different manner. He noticed that virtually all of the Pentecostal churches in the country “agree that Christianity is about success, status,

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<sup>762</sup> Gifford, “Healing in African Pentecostalism,” 252.

<sup>763</sup> Gifford, “Healing in African Pentecostalism.”

<sup>764</sup> Sasha Newell, “Pentecostal Witchcraft: Neoliberal Possession and Demonic Discourse in Ivorian Pentecostal Churches,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 37, no. 4 (2007): 477.

<sup>765</sup> Newell, “Pentecostal Witchcraft,” 472.

<sup>766</sup> Newell, “Pentecostal Witchcraft.”

victory, achievement.”<sup>767</sup> The popularity of these types of churches is compelling the “proto-Pentecostal” churches of the AIC genre to adopt the same message, which Gifford characterizes as a forced assimilation into the prosperity stream.<sup>768</sup>

In his recent study of eight rival world religions, Stephen Prothero ranks the Yoruba tradition as a world religion. Not only does it still thrive in several West African countries, but because of the Atlantic slave trade it has become prominent in the Americas. In Africa, where many former Yoruba religious practitioners have converted to Islam or Christianity, Prothero writes it “is rare to find someone who has entirely banished Yoruba religion from her repertoire.”<sup>769</sup> Prothero asserts that inside Islam and Christianity in West Africa, “Yoruba Muslims and Christians have steadily transformed into distribution channels for Yoruba religious culture.” As for the Americas, Yoruba culture, particularly the religious aspects, play an important and continuing role throughout the Caribbean and, significantly, in Brazil. Prothero provides multiple sources claiming that there may be as many as one hundred million people practicing some facet of Yoruba religion, most of them being in the New World.<sup>770</sup> In Brazil there are fewer than a million citizens who self-identified in the 2000 national census as practicing Candomble or Umbanda, but Prothero and other academics believe that millions of people have “multiple religious identities” while officially declaring themselves as Catholics.<sup>771</sup>

With regard to the Yoruba religious tradition, which Prothero states is the most widely practised religion in sub-Saharan Africa after Islam and Christianity, it is

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<sup>767</sup> Gifford, “Christianity Politics and Public Life in Kenya,” 128.

<sup>768</sup> Gifford, “Christianity Politics and Public Life in Kenya.”

<sup>769</sup> Prothero, *God Is Not One*, 221.

<sup>770</sup> Prothero, *God Is Not One*, 226.

<sup>771</sup> Prothero, *God Is Not One*, 225.

important to note the Yoruba world view, while not exactly the same as other indigenous religions of sub-Saharan Africa, has many more similarities to, than differences from, these traditions.<sup>772</sup> For example, within the Yoruba tradition, Prothero indicates that his research has shown it is not a religion created “to ward off the chill of death.”<sup>773</sup> It is rather a religion that is concerned with “human flourishing” in the world of the present, not the world of the future.<sup>774</sup> As he points out, Yoruba religionists attempt to procure the *orishas* to intervene on their behalf “in this-worldly matters of love, luck, and work.”<sup>775</sup> It is quite easy to make the case that Global South prosperity gospel denominations, such as the UCKG, specialize in meeting the “human flourishing” desires of contemporary Pentecostals, who retain this Yoruba or Yoruba-like world view, be they citizens of Brazil, Angola, the Ivory Coast, or the immigrant communities of North America.

In the Americas, however, it is not just the descendants of former African slaves who have retained the “this-worldly” orientation of indigenous religious tradition. Throughout Central America and much of South America there is a strong tradition of shamanism which has connections to the prosperity gospel. In their study of televangelists in Brazil and Guatemala, Dennis A. Smith and Leonido Silveira Campos point out that the prosperity gospel preachers they studied “position themselves as privileged intermediaries with the divine,” because of the “deeply rooted shamanic traditions in the region.”<sup>776</sup> That the prosperity gospel has found such fertile ground in Latin America is due in part to the this-worldly orientation of both indigenous shamanism

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<sup>772</sup> Prothero, *God Is Not One*, 226.

<sup>773</sup> Prothero, *God Is Not One*, 240.

<sup>774</sup> Prothero, *God Is Not One*, 241.

<sup>775</sup> Prothero, *God Is Not One*, 211.

<sup>776</sup> Smith and Silveira Campos, “Christianity and Television in Guatemala and Brazil,” 56.

and the transplanted version of the “human flourishing” traditions of sub-Saharan African religions.

What this brief look at several different areas of the Global South shows is that where the prosperity gospel has flourished, its theme of human betterment in this lifetime seems to have tapped into an active or residual layer of worldwide shamanism and folk religious beliefs. Sometimes this shamanism is embedded within the so-called world religions, but wherever it is found it does not seem to be disappearing in the face of modernity. It is ironic that Anglican priest Jacobs, focusing exclusively on the ethnic Chinese of the small island nation of Singapore, seems to be the only academic or theologian who has picked up on this clearly important alignment. Other theologians have, however, made the connection in their everyday work. Father Jose Arnaldo Juliano dos Santos, a Catholic Church historian from Brazil, in speaking about the success of the prosperity gospel in his country stated that it is “hard to compete with groups preaching reward in this life when you are promising it in the next one.”<sup>777</sup> Herein resides the simplest, yet most profound reason, for the success of the prosperity gospel in the Global South and in other parts of the world.

### **The Monomyth**

If the prosperity gospel is an echo of ancient religious impulses found in shamanism and folk religions, can this link be better understood from the vantage point of psychology? C.B. Peter, who lectured for years at Moi University in Kenya, and who was a first-hand witness to the phenomenal growth of neo-Pentecostalism in East Africa, believed that by utilizing a Jungian approach to personality theory, useful insights about

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<sup>777</sup> Tom Hennigan, “Evangelicals challenge Catholic Church’s dominance in Brazil,” *globalpost* March 15, 2013, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/americas/brazil/130314/evangelicals-challenge-catholic-church-dominance-brazil>.

the popularity of the prosperity gospel could be obtained. What Peter deduced was that “the entire prosperity drama revolves around some core archetypes” found in myths from time immemorial.<sup>778</sup>

The first of these archetypal characters is the hero-figure, who in the prosperity gospel drama is represented by the superstar preacher, be it Joel Osteen in the United States, Mike Velarde in the Philippines or Cash Luna in Central America. To Peter, the hero-figure “is invincible and central to the phenomenon.”<sup>779</sup> He commands, even demands, the devotion of his followers, and whether on the television screen or the megachurch stage, the prosperity gospel superstar presents an image as “a near-perfect replica of the divine.”<sup>780</sup> To his devotees his prophetic word “becomes the Law,” and his wish to “plant a seed” becomes a command.<sup>781</sup> Usually his audience will respond in “a trancelike compliance.”<sup>782</sup> Peter points out that an almost necessary component of the Hero’s story is that he must have experienced a “rags to riches” narrative that includes overcoming numerous major obstacles.<sup>783</sup>

The second archetypal device in the prosperity gospel story is the “community of faith in distress.”<sup>784</sup> Sometimes the community is comprised of people who have already been rescued from poverty, but usually they are the aspiring rich who have just started to climb the economic ladder of success. What this community wants is the same type of blessings that have been accrued by the pastor, and he assures them that they will not have to wait until the next life to be rewarded. All they require is faith in God’s word and

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<sup>778</sup> C.B. Peter, “The Church’s Response to Poverty: A Jungian Appraisal of the ‘Prosperity Gospel’ Phenomenon,” *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* 14, no. 1 (2009): 141.

<sup>779</sup> Peter, “The Church’s Response to Poverty.”

<sup>780</sup> Peter, “The Church’s Response to Poverty.”

<sup>781</sup> Peter, “The Church’s Response to Poverty.”

<sup>782</sup> Peter, “The Church’s Response to Poverty.”

<sup>783</sup> Peter, “The Church’s Response to Poverty,” 142.

<sup>784</sup> Peter, “The Church’s Response to Poverty.”



that of the pastor, but of course they must follow the formula for giving provided by the man of God.

The third archetypal motif is the creation of an ideal, alternative world, where a heaven on earth awaits the believer.<sup>785</sup> Often this alternative world is the megachurch of the pastor, or in many cases the extensive religious and business complex created by the hero-figure. It is here that testimonies from the former downtrodden and now successful devotees serve to inspire those whose “due season” has not yet arrived.<sup>786</sup>

Peter contends that what is happening with the prosperity gospel drama is that it is repeating the archetypal mythology of humanity throughout time. This myth, the Hero Myth, is referred to by Joseph Campbell as the “monomyth,” and its reprise in the prosperity gospel narrative “fits into” what Carl Jung termed the “Collective Unconscious.”<sup>787</sup> In short, the prosperity gospel myth is another version of the most ancient of myths, and as such it has appeal across the globe in a myriad of settings.

### **Fleshing Out the Analysis of Peter**

The characterization by Peter that the prosperity gospel preacher portrays himself as a super hero and is seen by his devotees in that light is not simply perceptive, it is an extremely accurate description of this archetypal figure. It is highly unlikely that when Peter wrote this article, given his vantage point in East Africa, that he would have been aware of the tapes that surfaced in Brazil of UCKG czar, Edir Macedo, encouraging his pastors to portray the role of “super hero of the people” in battling the devil.<sup>788</sup> As for the fact that super heroes overcome obstacles, many of the iconic stars of the prosperity

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<sup>785</sup> Peter, “The Church’s Response to Poverty,” 143.

<sup>786</sup> The “due season” is a creative term employed by David Oyedepo which is taken from Galatians 6:9 to help explain the timing of blessings that have not yet arrived for prosperity gospel practitioners. See Oyedepo, “Understanding Financial Prosperity,” 355-64.

<sup>787</sup> Peter, “The Church’s Response to Poverty,” 144-145.

<sup>788</sup> Kramer, “Spectacle and the Staging of Power in Brazilian Neo-Pentecostalism,” 104.

gospel claim to have had a miraculous healing at some time in their lives, usually in their younger years. Oftentimes the miraculous healing is eventually seen as a sign from God to become a minister. Prosperity gospel luminaries such as Kenneth Hagin, David Yonggi Cho, and Mike Velarde fit this profile. As for the “rags to riches” label of Peter for the archetypal hero, these are the precise words that Ruth Marshall used to describe the life of Benson Idahosa.<sup>789</sup> In his hagiographic biography, the seemingly standard form of biography for prosperity preachers, Idahosa goes from being a sickly abandoned baby to the richest and most successful pastor of his generation in Africa.<sup>790</sup>

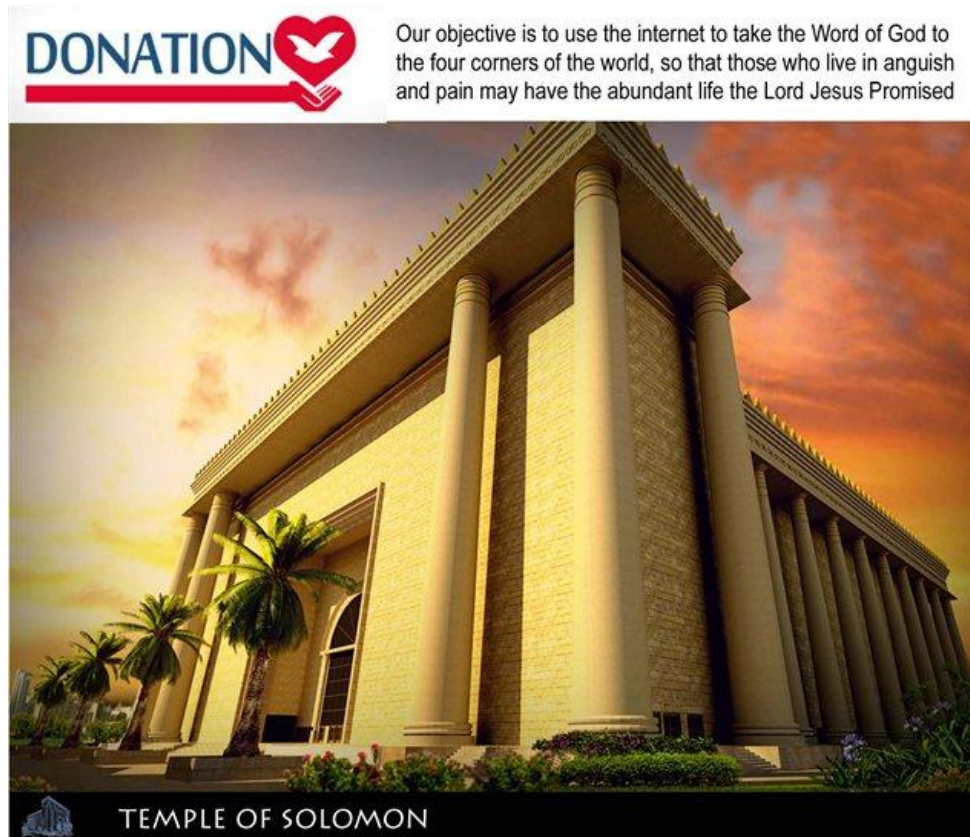
As for the other two archetypal categories referred to by Peter, “the community of faith in distress” concept is definitely not unique to the prosperity gospel, as it has been part of all religious communities in all of the world’s religions since their inception. That it has been around as long as there has been religion, however, makes its appearance in Peter’s prosperity drama not surprising, but expected which adds to the validity of his interpretation. The third category, however, the ideal alternative world, has some unique prosperity gospel examples in the Global South. These can be seen in the elaborate world headquarters and pilgrimage sites for some of the massive African and Latin American denominations that have sprung up in the last few decades. One such example is the efficient, immaculate, and wealthy business and residential complex of Enoch Adeboye’s Redemption City, an island of excellence in the midst of a sea of Nigerian chaos and corruption. While there are dozens of other examples of this ideal alternative world created by the heroes of the prosperity gospel, like David Yonggi Cho’s Prayer Mountain retreat, it will be hard to top the recreation of Solomon’s temple currently being

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<sup>789</sup> Marshall, *Political Spiritualities*, 298.

<sup>790</sup> Lyons and Lyons, “Magical Medicine on Television,” 112.

undertaken by the UCKG in Sao Paulo.<sup>791</sup> The temple promises to be an opulent, state of the art edifice which will rival the stadiums being built in Brazil to host the FIFA World Cup, all of which are scheduled for completion in 2014, (see figure 15).<sup>792</sup>



**Figure 15: Artistic rendering of the new "Temple of Solomon" being built by the UCKG in Sao Paulo, Brazil.**

If it seems that the argument for the link between the prosperity gospel and Campbell's monomyth is too trite and simple, consider the conclusion that anthropologist Hasu provides for the popularity of the type of prosperity gospel Pentecostalism that he witnessed during his research among Tanzanian Lutherans. For Hasu it was all about the

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<sup>791</sup> The UCKG launched construction of the temple in 2010. See Tom Phillips, "Solomon's Temple in Brazil would put Christ the Redeemer in the shade," *The Guardian*, July 21, 2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jul/21/solomon-temple-brazil-christ-redeemer>. For an update on the considerable progress already made on the temple, please consult the website provided by the church located at <http://uckg-templeofsolomon.blogspot.ca/>.

<sup>792</sup> Figure 15 is taken from the New Zealand website of the UCKG. It asks worshippers to donate funds to assist in the construction of "The New Temple of Solomon," which will open in Sao Paulo in 2014. Image, <http://www.uckg.co.nz/temple-of-solomon.aspx>, (accessed February 3, 2014).

hope of a better future provided by the theology, but this is a hope that is different from that provided by traditional Christianity or other religious options available in Tanzania. Hasu singled out “the immediacy of the promises of the charismatic preacher,” along with “reassuring rituals” in the “context of a congregational community,” and “an explanation for everything” as the salient reasons for the appeal of the theology.<sup>793</sup> Most religions have always provided reassuring rituals and a congregational community, and to some extent an explanation for everything, but it is the absolute certainty about the explanation for everything provided by the prosperity gospel and the this-worldly immediacy of this theology that separates it from other current religious alternatives. The focus on the immediacy of results harkens back to much older religions, such as shamanism, folk religion and Taoism, traditions in which Campbell’s monomyth has been playing out for millennia.

### **The Prosperity Gospel’s Potential for Pastors**

Near the end of the introduction to this thesis three important aspects of this study were referenced, namely the message of the prosperity gospel; the messengers of the theology; and the audiences receiving, believing, and practicing the message. The details of the prosperity gospel were analyzed at the beginning of this thesis, and in the concluding section considerable space has been allotted to trying to understand why the message has appealed to the congregations of the prosperity gospel denominations that dot the Global South. While it might seem obvious as to why the prosperity gospel might appeal to the pastors who proclaim the theology, this study would not be complete without a brief examination of this specific issue.

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<sup>793</sup> Hasu, “World Bank & Heavenly Bank in Poverty & Prosperity,” 690.

Throughout his extensive writings on the prosperity gospel in sub-Saharan Africa, Paul Gifford has championed the idea that the most important reason for the popularity of the theology in this region of the world is that “it has proved very functional for pastors.”<sup>794</sup> Propounding on the prosperity gospel “has brought in the revenues that have enabled pastors to survive in a very competitive field, in extremely depressed circumstances.”<sup>795</sup> The “extremely depressed circumstances” referenced by Gifford describe much of the Global South, and so it is not surprising that Ruth Marshall noted that in the 1990s “literally tens of thousands” of new prosperity gospel churches sprang up across Southern Nigeria, and “suddenly the possibility of achieving wealth through God’s work seemed within reach.”<sup>796</sup> Among new graduates in Nigeria, there is a standing joke that job prospects are so bleak that if unemployment is to be avoided the graduate has but two options; found a church or start an NGO.<sup>797</sup> The anthropologist who brought this joke to light, Donald Jordan Smith, penned a book on the endemic problem of corruption in Nigeria. Smith states that this long-running joke implies that the prosperity gospel churches and the NGOs are merely “fronts for their founders, designed simply to generate wealth.”<sup>798</sup>

But the prosperity gospel offers its pastors much more than a path to possible riches. Once a prosperity gospel pastor demonstrates that he can attract a significant following, the possibility of attaining some form of political power or of becoming a power broker becomes a distinct reality. For the first eighty years of their existence, Pentecostals, (meaning classical Pentecostals), were perceived to be “other worldly” in

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<sup>794</sup> Gifford, “The Complex Provenance of African Pentecostal Theology,” 65.

<sup>795</sup> Gifford, “The Complex Provenance of African Pentecostal Theology.”

<sup>796</sup> Marshall, *Political Spiritualities*, 181.

<sup>797</sup> Donald Jordan Smith, *A Culture of Corruption: Everyday Deception and Popular Discontent in Nigeria* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 88.

<sup>798</sup> Smith, *A Culture of Corruption*, 226.

their orientation and showed a pronounced lack of interest in politics. This all began to change when the more “this-worldly” prosperity gospel-oriented neo-Pentecostals began to rise to prominence. The first evidence of this in Latin America occurred in 1986 in Brazil, when eighteen Pentecostals, led by the UCKG, were elected to the Brazilian Assembly.<sup>799</sup> Now the UCKG has hundreds of hand-picked politicians scattered throughout the municipal, state and federal levels of the Brazilian political system.<sup>800</sup> “Brother Mike” Velarde formed his own political party in the Philippines and even contemplated running for the presidency of his country.<sup>801</sup> Harold Caballeros did run for the presidency of Guatemala, and while he lost the election, he ultimately leveraged his power base into becoming the foreign minister of his country.<sup>802</sup> In Africa there are many neo-Pentecostal pastors who have retained their churches and entered politics. One such minister is long-time prosperity gospel stalwart and Zambian televangelist from the Victory Bible Church of Lusaka, Nevers Mumba, who parlayed his celebrity status to become vice president of Zambia and later the high commissioner to Canada. Currently Mumba is the leader of the official opposition in the Zambian parliament.<sup>803</sup> It goes without saying, however, that when such pastors build a power base, they open themselves up to competition of the fiercest kind, and they usually have to become quite ruthless in fending off rivals or denigrators. Edir Macedo’s very public confrontations

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<sup>799</sup> Edward L. Cleary, introduction to *Power, Politics, and Pentecostals in Latin America*, ed. Edward L. Cleary and Hannah W. Stewart-Gambino (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 11.

<sup>800</sup> Oro, “The politics of the Universal Church,” 54.

<sup>801</sup> Wiegele, “The Prosperity Gospel among Filipino Catholic Charismatics,” 173.

<sup>802</sup> “New Guatemalan Foreign Minister appointed,” January 10, 2013,

<http://edition.channel5belize.com/archives/80571>.

<sup>803</sup> Paul Gifford attended and wrote extensively about the “Victory ‘94” convention staged by Pastor Mumba in Lusaka from August 7-13, 1994. This convention extolled the “Faith Gospel” as Gifford terms it and featured many prosperity gospel notables such as Reinhard Bonnke, the German televangelist. Gifford also emphasizes the two years that Mumba spent in Dallas from 1982 to 1984 at the Christ for the Nations Bible School, the same prosperity gospel alma mater of Benson Idahosa and Ezekiel Guti among others. See Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 232-37.

with his former protégé, Valdemiro Santiago, who now heads up the second largest prosperity denomination in Brazil, exemplify this point, as does David Yonggi Cho's swift dismissal of twenty-eight deacons who accused him of mishandling church funds.<sup>804</sup>

If wealth and power are not enough to continue to motivate a prosperity gospel pastor, then perhaps the spectre of other types of prominence become the motivating factors for prosperity gospel pastors. This appears to have been the case with Kong Hee, who in 1989 founded the renowned City Harvest Church in Singapore. Hee (see figure 16)<sup>805</sup> is currently on trial in Singapore, accused of siphoning off \$20 million in church funds to finance the international singing career of his Asian pop star wife, Sun Ho, and then misappropriating an equal amount to "cover up the original diversion."<sup>806</sup> Hee's desire for fame as an impresario, and as the spouse of an international rock star, is perhaps a singular occurrence in the amazing set of stories that have occurred within the world of iconic superstar pastors. It does, however, strike some similar notes to themes developed in the Brazilian television show, *Decadence*, which parodied the rise to prominence of Bishop Edir Macedo of the UCKG.<sup>807</sup> It is quite possible that if Shakespeare were alive and writing today, his keen eye for the foibles of the human condition would be drawn to the seemingly universal characters which populate the world of the prosperity gospel, be they pastors or their worshippers.

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<sup>804</sup> "Family-fraud a million person church," *Christianity Today*, 12.

<sup>805</sup> Figure 16. Pastor Kong Hee and his rock star wife, Sun Ho leave a Singapore court of law. Hee is currently on trial for the embezzlement of millions of dollars of City Harvest Church funds to promote the singing career of his wife. "Singapore mega-church founder embezzles \$26M to finance pop-singer wife's career," photo, 2013, <http://www.rawstory.com/rs/2013/10/06/singapore-mega-church-founder-embezzles-26m-to-finance-pop-singer-wifes-career>, (accessed February 3, 2014).

<sup>806</sup> Bhavan Jaipragas, "Scandal puts spotlight on rich Singapore churches," *AFP News*, October 6, 2013, <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/scandal-puts-spotlight-rich-singapore-churches-071254546.html>. According to the Jaipragas article nearly \$2 million of the funds that were misappropriated were used to fund a pop video, *China Wine*, which Ho shot with Wyclef Jean. The video, which has over a million and a half hits, can be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Twxf2LraoEE>.

<sup>807</sup> Freston, *Evangelical and Politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America*, 46.



**Figure 16:** *Pastor Kong Hee and his rock star wife, Sun Ho, from City Harvest Church, Singapore.*

### **A Final Thought**

Over the last four decades the prosperity gospel has become an immensely popular theology across the Global South, wherever Christianity is found. It is one of the main reasons for the significant growth of Pentecostalism in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Pacific Rim of Asia. Its appeal shows no signs of abating, despite criticism on a plethora of fronts. The new theology has found acceptance in a wide variety of settings among all three waves of Pentecostalism. And just as the spiritual world of Pentecostalism seen in glossolalia, exorcism and divine healing, recognizes the spiritual world of indigenous religions, the prosperity gospel appears to find common ground with older traditions as well. It seems to do this by tapping into ancient traditions and beliefs concerned with human flourishing. As Philip Jenkins has observed, the prosperity gospel is now shaping the development of global Christianity and as this thesis has illustrated, in some emerging examples it is causing other world religions to react and



adapt. Given that its popularity has yet to crest in the Global South, it appears that the prosperity gospel may well remain a significant religious force for decades, even centuries, to come.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

#### PROSPERITY GOSPEL SCRIPTURE

The following verses from the King James Bible represent some of the key foundational underpinnings of the prosperity gospel.

##### **God's Covenant with Abraham and his descendents**

Deuteronomy 8:17-18 And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth the power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day.

Deuteronomy 9: 5-6 Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land: but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Understand therefore, that the Lord thy God giveth thee not this land to possess it for thy righteousness: for though are a stiffnecked people.

Deuteronomy 28:12 The Lord shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy hand in all his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow.

Deuteronomy 29: 29 The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.

Joshua 1:5 There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

##### **Contemporary Christians are the inheritors of the covenant with Abraham**

Galatians 3:13-14 Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ: that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Galatians 3:29 And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 4:7 Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son: and if a son, than an heir of God through Christ.

##### **Scripture supporting the use of positive confession to call what is desired into existence**

Mark 11:23 For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass: he shall have whatsoever he saith.

Romans 4:17 (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead and calleth those things which be not as though they were.

##### **Proof that God wants his followers to prosper**

Psalms 9: 1-4 I will praise thee O Lord, with my whole heart: I will shew forth all thy marvelous works. I will be glad and rejoice in thee: I will sing praise to thy name, O though most High. When mine enemies are turned back, they shall fall and perish at thy presence. For thou has maintained my right and my cause; thou satest in the throne judging right.

Proverbs 3:9-10 Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.

Proverbs 19: 17 He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.

Ecclesiastes 11:1 Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.

Malachi 3:10 Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

Mark 10: 29-30 And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions: and in the world to come eternal life.

Luke 6:38 Give, and it shall be given unto you: good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.

John 10:10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

Philippians 4:19 But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

3 John 2 Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.

**Reasons why a person is not prospering**

2 Corinthians 9: 6 But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap bountifully.

James 4:2 Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask no

## APPENDIX B

### KENNETH COPELAND'S FORMULAIC PRAYER<sup>808</sup>

“Father, in the Name of Jesus, we ask you for \$\_\_\_\_. We have this money in our heavenly account and we are withdrawing this amount now. We believe we receive \$\_\_\_\_. As in Mark 11:23-24, we believe it in our hearts and confess now that it ours in the Name of Jesus. We agree that we have \$\_\_\_\_ according to Mathew 18: 19. From this day forward, we roll the care of this over on You and thank You for it. Satan, in the Name of Jesus, we take authority over you; we bind your operation now and render you helpless. Ministering spirits, we charge you to go forth and cause this amount to come to us according to Hebrews 1: 14. Father, we praise Your Name for meeting our needs according to Your riches in glory by Christ Jesus and for multiplying our seed for sowing in the Name of Jesus.”

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<sup>808</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*, 103.

## APPENDIX C

### THE FULL GOSPEL BUSINESS MEN'S FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL (FGBMFI)

The first meeting of what became the FGBMFI was held in a Los Angeles restaurant in October of 1951.<sup>809</sup> It was organized by Demos Shakarian, a wealthy dairy farmer, real estate developer and fervent Pentecostal from Southern California. The guest speaker at the first meeting was Oral Roberts, who would become a spiritual mentor to Shakarian.<sup>810</sup> In turn, Shakarian would come to serve on the board of Robert's ministry. Shakarian's vision for the organization was to provide a setting where Christian businessmen could meet on a regular basis to share their religious testimonies. From its outset it was an interdenominational organization, of lay business people, which would not accept ministers as members, although they could attend as guests. Chapters of the organization began to mushroom all over North America, and because of its Pentecostal flavor it became an important catalyst for the charismatic movement. As the organization grew, regional, national, and eventually international annual conferences were staged for the burgeoning membership.

The FGBFI proved to be an important dissemination point for the prosperity gospel. Both Kenneth Hagin and Kenneth Copeland spoke at local chapter meetings and at international conventions.<sup>811</sup> As the movement spread internationally, it would eventually become more popular in the Global South than in its country of origin, just as was the case for the prosperity gospel. Businessmen who joined the organization found that their entrepreneurial nature meshed with the prosperity gospel which evolved into a strong theological element within the FGBMFI. By 1991 the organization operated in 112 countries and as it pertains to some Pentecostal hot spots in the Global South, there were eighty chapters in Indonesia, one hundred chapters in Zaire and nearly double that in Nigeria.<sup>812</sup> As of 2010, there were six thousand chapters in 160 countries.<sup>813</sup>

One of the appealing features of the movement for members was how it allowed charismatic businessmen to network, both inside and outside of the organization. The success of the movement brought it to the attention of many entrepreneurial pastors, some of whom attempted to replicate the organization within their particular church or denomination. One such leader was Enoch Adeboye of the RCCG who created an elite organization within his denomination that he named Christ the Redeemer's Friends Universal (CRFU).<sup>814</sup> An evangelistic organization, the CRFU targets the top decision makers in Nigerian society by staging dinners, seminars, breakfasts, and concerts in upper end hotels.<sup>815</sup>

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<sup>809</sup> Matthew W. Tallman, *Demos Shakarian: The Life, Legacy, and Vision of a Full Gospel Business Man* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2010), 142.

<sup>810</sup> Tallman, *Demos Shakarian*, 143.

<sup>811</sup> Tallman, *Demos Shakarian*, 184.

<sup>812</sup> Tallman, *Demos Shakarian*, 249.

<sup>813</sup> Tallman, *Demos Shakarian*, 274.

<sup>814</sup> Olufunke Adeboye, "Arrowhead of Nigerian Pentecostalism," 42.

<sup>815</sup> Adeboye, "Arrowhead of Nigerian Pentecostalism."

Wherever the prosperity gospel flourishes, the FGBMFI or its imitators like the CRFU or the International Christian Chamber of Commerce (ICCC) will be close at hand.<sup>816</sup>

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<sup>816</sup> There has been a distinct lack of academic attention paid to the FGBMFI. The only books written about the founder, Demos Shakarian, have been penned by those with a close, insider perspective. After an extensive search of academic journals the only article that turned up was an intriguing account of the impact of the FGBMFI in Ghana. See Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Missionaries without Robes," *Pneuma* 19, no. 2 (1997): 167-88.

## APPENDIX D

### THE GRASSLEY SENATE INVESTIGATION

In November of 2007, Senator Charles Grassley of Iowa, the ranking Republican on the US Senate Finance Committee, launched an investigation into the ministries of six Pentecostal and charismatic pastors who espouse the prosperity gospel. The ministries under question were those of Kenneth Copeland, Creflo Dollar, Benny Hinn, Eddie Long, Joyce Meyer, and Randy and Paula White. Grassley had previously questioned the finances of other non-profit organizations such as the American Red Cross, the United Way and the Smithsonian Institution.<sup>817</sup>

The probe began after Grassley began receiving reports that many prosperity gospel preachers were living lavish lifestyles “while raking in millions of dollars tax-free every year” and in doing so perhaps abusing their tax-free church status.<sup>818</sup> The six in question were chosen for the investigation “because of the extent of anecdotal information he [Grassley] received from whistle-blowers about them.”<sup>819</sup> In a response to the investigation, Creflo Dollar published a financial statement in an Atlanta newspaper which showed that his World Changers Church International took in \$69 million in revenue in 2006, while also admitting that his congregation gave him a Rolls Royce as a gift.<sup>820</sup> This was as “open” as Dollar was prepared to be during the course of the investigation, a course also followed by the Whites, Eddie Long and Kenneth Copeland. Only Joyce Myers and Benny Hinn appeared to cooperate with the investigation.<sup>821</sup> In a message to his congregation Eddie Long represented the view of the ministers when he stated that “Grassley’s request for financial information was an attack on our religious freedom and privacy rights.”<sup>822</sup>

Grassley quickly discovered that this investigation was unlike his other probes as the bulk of the ministers began stonewalling information and threatening their employees if they cooperated with the Senate investigators. One former employee of Kenneth and Gloria Copeland commented, “The Copeland’s employ guerilla tactics to keep their employees silent. We are flat out told and threatened that if we talk, God will blight our finances, strike our families down, and pretty much afflict us with everything evil and unholy.”<sup>823</sup> Grassley also learned that his investigation had enraged the religious right in his home state and even though he was a five-term senator, he was summarily denied his seat with the Iowa delegation to the Republican National Convention in 2008.<sup>824</sup>

The work of the committee on this issue languished for three years before a surprising conclusion was published in 2011. Instead of taking Senate action, Grassley’s committee recommended that the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, a Virginia based-agency, head up a study to review tax policy impacting churches. No action was taken on the six ministries in question. In addition the committee recommended that the federal tax code be amended so that churches could by-pass the “no electioneering rule” and be able to channel their tax-free revenues to the political candidates of their choice.

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<sup>817</sup> Talise D. Moorer, “Senate investigates mega-church leaders,” *New York Amsterdam News* 98, no. 50 (2007): 6-6.

<sup>818</sup> Joseph L. Conn, “Under Religious Right Heat,” *Church & State* 64, no. 2 (2011): 5.

<sup>819</sup> “Grassley plans no hearings on alleged lavish spenders,” *Christian Century* 125, no. 1 (2008): 19.

<sup>820</sup> Moorer, “Senate investigates mega-church leaders,” 6.

<sup>821</sup> Conn, “Under Religious Right Heat,” 4.

<sup>822</sup> Moorer, “Senate investigates mega-church leaders,” 6.

<sup>823</sup> Conn, “Under Religious Right Heat,” 4.

<sup>824</sup> Conn, “Under Religious Right Heat,” 5.

Not surprisingly the preachers under investigation saw the about face by the Grassley committee as nothing less than the work of God. In a letter to donors, Kenneth Copeland ministries stated, “It was God’s faithfulness and your prayers and support that truly made the difference.”<sup>825</sup> More cynical observers were inclined to believe that “the Grassley retreat”<sup>826</sup> was a response to political pressure. For pragmatists, like Ole Anthony, President of the Trinity Foundation, a Texas-based watchdog group of evangelical Christians that highlights the misconduct of televangelists, nothing has changed. Instead the carnage continues and as Anthony lamented, “The most desperate and weakest in our society are being raped by these guys.”<sup>827</sup>

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<sup>825</sup> Conn, “Under Religious Right Heat,” 6.

<sup>826</sup> Conn, “Under Religious Right Heat.”

<sup>827</sup> Conn, “Under Religious Right Heat.”

**APPENDIX E**  
**THE REDEEMED CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF GOD –**  
**LETHBRIDGE PARISH**

On Saturday, December 7, 2013, I met with Pastor Adejare Popoola, the leader of the Lethbridge parish of the Redeemed Christian Church of God. Over a period of ninety minutes we discussed his association with the RCCG, the local parish, and his life as an immigrant in Canada.

Mr. Popoola, a member of the Yoruba ethnic group from Nigeria, grew up in an Islamic home along with two older sisters and two younger brothers. He joined the RCCG at the age of fifteen. Overtime his two older sisters also converted to Christianity, but one of them gave up her new religion and returned to Islam. His two younger brothers are still practicing Muslims and according to Mr. Popoola, are as devoted to Islam as he is to Christianity.

After finishing high school Adejare went to university in Nigeria where he obtained a Master's degree in Psychology. He also studied at Clark University, in Worcester, Massachusetts, where he graduated with a Master's degree in Communications. His studies also include graduating from the RCCG Bible College in Nigeria. Mr. Popoola informed me that one of the requirements of a graduate from a RCCG Bible School is to plant a church, something that he did in Lodz, Poland where he lived before moving to Calgary four years ago. After spending some time in Calgary, the RCCG asked him, along with his wife and two children, to move to Lethbridge to open a church.

To support his family, Mr. Popoola holds down two full time jobs in the area. In the first of these jobs, he works a forty-hour-a-week shift at the Agropur cheese plant in Diamond City, thirteen kilometres north of Lethbridge. Utilizing his psychology degree, Mr. Popoola also works about thirty-five hours a week of flex-time at the St. Michael's Health Centre in Lethbridge. Currently Adejare is also studying for his Alberta certification as a psychologist, and his Canadian certification as a human resources professional. After completing these activities, he still finds time to be a father, husband and pastor of the local RCCG parish which he founded and leads. He conducts two, two hour services every Sunday, leads a prayer meeting on Thursday evening and attends a youth service, which he does not lead, on Friday evening.

Although the RCCG website for Canada lists ninety-six parishes in the country, Mr. Popoola mentioned that the number is actually well over one hundred. Those pastoring the Canadian parishes are people much like himself, says Mr. Popoola, in that they are all Nigerian, trained in Nigeria, and working full-time at other jobs in addition to being pastors. Most parishes start out in the living room of one of the members before they move to a public space such as a hotel or a school. In Lethbridge the first public venue for the parish was in the local Travelodge Hotel. From there the church moved to the Lethbridge Legion where it still holds one of its Sunday meetings. The other Sunday meeting is now held in room L1060 of the University of Lethbridge. With regard to the campus meeting, Pastor Popoola states that about fifty to sixty students attend, most from the University of Lethbridge, with the others coming from Lethbridge College. All of



these students are Nigerians, with about fifty percent being ethnic Yoruba and the remainder being either Igbo or Edo in ethnicity.

As for the RCCG's future, I asked Pastor Popoola what he thought might happen at the death of the septuagenarian General Overseer, Bishop Enoch Adeboye. He replied, "That is the question that everyone is wondering about." But he assured me that "the matter is in God's hands." I also asked Pastor Popoola about the differences between the RCCG and one of Nigeria's other leading Pentecostal denominations, the Winners' Chapel ministry headed up by Bishop David Oyedepo. Pastor Popoola explained to me that the basic theology was the same, but that the churches employed different tactics in church building. He also pointed out that the prime emphasis of Winner's Chapel was "to make people rich."

My final questions for the pastor centred on the Nasrul-Lahi-Fatih Society (NASFAT), the Nigerian Muslim organization that sprang up twenty years ago to counter the proselytizing impact of thousands of prosperity gospel churches that dot the country. I wrote out the acronym for the organization and asked him if he was familiar with it. As I finished writing out the capital letters he smiled and told me that he knew them well. We talked for several minutes about NASFAT from which I gleaned some intriguing observations. When the organization first formed, Mr. Popoola noted that NASFAT strategically located local meeting places near RCCG church buildings and those of other Pentecostal churches. According to him NASFAT also scheduled meetings on Sundays, a novel time for a Muslim religious gathering, at precisely the same time as the RCCG was holding services. He believed that this was a deliberate tactic by NASFAT so that Muslim youth would not be attracted to RCCG meetings. We both shared our amazement at the fact that NASFAT now has over a million members and that it employs many of the same evangelistic strategies of its prosperity gospel competitors.

The overwhelming feeling I came away with from my interview with Pastor Popoola was that he was completely devoted to the RCCG and its cause. When I asked him where he might be in five years, he replied that he would still be a pastor and that he would move anywhere his church asked him to go. If the faith and dedication of Pastor Popoola is representative of the type of clergy that comprise the RCCG, it is not difficult to explain the meteoric growth of this denomination.