

NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

*ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE OF TRADITIONAL  
EXPLANATIONS OF AFRICAN INDEPENDENCY:  
A Case Study of the Eternity Worship Centre, Nairobi, Kenya*

BY  
JACKSON GARPU WEAH

*A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School in Partial Fulfilment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Church History*

JULY 2004

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July, 2004



Student's Declaration

ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE OF TRADITIONAL EXPLANATIONS OF  
AFRICAN INDEPENDENCY: A CASE STUDY OF THE ETERNITY WORSHIP  
CENTRE, NAIROBI, KENYA

I declare that this thesis is my original work and has not been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit.

The views presented herein are not necessarily those of Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology or the examiners.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

  
JACKSON GARPU WEAH

July, 2004

## ABSTRACT

In the last two decades a new phenomenon has occurred within African Christianity. There has been a proliferation of new religious groups, churches and ministries which for the most part have seceded from the classical African Initiated Churches or among themselves. These movements arose in the wake of the collapsed economic and political systems in the decade of the 1980s. The failure of nation-states created massive disillusionment which resulted in many Africans turning to these popular religions as a place believed to give full participation and satisfaction.

This present work attempts to tell the story of the Eternity Worship Centre as an example of this new phenomenon by utilizing oral history, relying heavily on the memories of the founding members. It aims at analyzing and critiquing the traditional explanations of African independency which states that Africa Initiated Churches emerged as a result of revolting against legitimate missionary leadership.

The first chapter/ introduction state the purpose, significance and methodology of this task and review some of the relevant literature. The next four chapters tell the story of the Eternity Worship Centre and its secession from the Rhema Fellowship. The second chapter briefly traces the background of Christianity in Africa as well as the rise and traditional explanations of African independency. Chapter three mainly focus on the rise of the new phenomenon (popular religion) in Africa in the decade of the 1980s and concluded with the history of Rhema Fellowship and the birth of Eternity Worship Centre. Chapter four highlights the analysis and influences on the Eternity Worship Centre by different religious forces. Chapter five takes a careful look at the factors which were responsible for the secession of Eternity Worship Centre from the Rhema Fellowship. The thesis concluded with lessons, recommendations, and future of the new phenomenon in Africa in Chapter six.



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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

AIC	Africa Inland Church
AIM	Africa Inland Mission
AICs	Africa Initiated Churches
ACFI	African Christians Fellowship International
CMS	Christian Missionary Society
RGC	Redeemed Gospel Church
BWOC	Bethel World Outreach Centre
CGMI	Church of God Mission International
PAG	Pentecostal Assemblies of God
PEFA	Pentecostal Evangelistic Fellowship of Africa
FOCUS	Fellowship of Christian Unions
KANU	Kenyan African National Union
NEGST	Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology



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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This research critiques the traditional explanations of African independency by engaging in historical investigation and analysis of the primary dynamic factors which were behind the secession of the Eternity Worship Centre from the Rhema Fellowship of Karen, Nairobi, Kenya. The Eternity Worship Centre secession from the Rhema Fellowship is a case study illustrative of the inadequacy of the traditional explanations for African independency. African Initiated Churches have a unique history in African Christianity. They seceded from historic mission churches for diverse reasons, such as: protest against white domination in the mission churches, the absence of Africanization in the leadership of the historic mission churches, cultural practices and norms,(circumcision, polygamy etc) and land disputes.

In the last decade a new phenomenon has occurred within African Christianity. There has been a proliferation of new religious groups, churches, and ministries which for the most part have seceded from the classic African Initiated Churches or among themselves. Churches such as Eternity Worship Centre and the Rhema Fellowship that arose in the decades of the 80s fall within the category of new religious movements in Africa that have introduced a changing face to African Christianity. This needs to be unravelled in order to clearly understand the religious landscape on the continent.

This study is significant in that it critiques the traditional explanations of African independency in the wake of the rise of the newer religious movements. Since

the factors to be explored in this research concern the Eternity Worship Centre it is hoped that the insights of this study will be useful to the membership of the Church. Finally, this work contributes toward a fuller understanding of the nature and form of Christianity in contemporary Africa. Research in this area is difficult because of limited literature. Most available information is on the classical or traditional African Initiated Churches.

The researcher takes into consideration the several approaches historians have taken toward African Church history. Peter Falk and C.P. Groves both presented a missionary historiographical approach in *The Growth of the Church in Africa* and in *The Planting of Christianity in Africa* respectively. This approach told the story of the African Church, but tends to emphasize the role of the ex-patriot missionary as the protagonist. The role of the missionary or the “native” who cooperated with the missionary is the main story line. This approach is significant in that it tends to tell the story of the African contributions to the establishment of Christianity in Africa, but their emphasis is on the role of the missionary or the national who followed the examples of the missionary. Historians who subscribe to this view have branded Africa Initiated Churches as nativistic, messianic, separatists, secessionists or syncretistic cults revolting against legitimate missionary leadership.<sup>1</sup> They have failed to consider the many African nationals that initiated authentically Christian churches to reach their fellow Africans.

The second approach is the nationalist historiography. The focus of this approach is a reaction against the negative image of the African culture projected by the Europeans and seeks to give a new and dynamic emphasis to initiated or independent expressions of Christianity in Africa. This approach aims at studying how communities with their own viable religion and society came into contact with

Christianity and reacted to this external agent of change. Terrance O. Ranger and A.J. Temu described such outlook in their works *The African Churches of Tanzania* and *British Protestant Missions* respectively. These historians have blamed the missionaries as being agents of colonialism. They tend to favour and perceive African Initiated Churches (AICs) as saviours of Africa from colonial degradation and opposition and eventually serving as the vehicle for African nationalism.

Bengt Sundkler in his classic *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* viewed African Initiated Churches (AICs) as authentic African Christianity in search of liberty and religious expression. African Initiated Churches (AICs) came into existence as an opposition to European control but also by a positive desire to adapt the message of the church to the heritage of African culture.<sup>2</sup> David Barrett, a pioneer in the study of African Independent Churches in East Africa, wrote in his book *Schism and Renewal in Africa*, that the independent movement was seen “as a massive schismatic reaction to foreign missionary enterprise”. But he adds that the participants in this movement saw themselves “as movements of renewal to create a genuinely indigenous Christianity on Africa soil.”<sup>3</sup> Tuner, defined African Initiated Church as “a Church which has been founded in Africa, by Africans, and primarily for Africans.”<sup>4</sup>

B.A. Ogot and F.B. Welbourn further asserted in their work *A Place to Feel at Home* that indeed African Initiated Churches are looking for a church of the Africans, governed by the Africans, and for the Africans, to make daily supplications to Almighty God led by priests who have the welfare of Africans at heart.<sup>5</sup> This perspective has served as a useful corrective to the missionary approach but its strong ideologically driven nationalist tone has proven to distort the story of the African church and made it fall short of what it seeks to replace.



Neither of these approaches has addressed the underlying dynamic factors of this present phenomenon of African Initiated Churches' secessions from other African Initiated Churches in post-independent Africa. Paul Gifford could be considered as pioneer in this area when he described this new phenomenon in his book "*New Dimensions in African Christianity*" as a popular religion found in both cities and rural areas and with distinct features apart from the traditional African Initiated Churches such as the Ethiopian and Zionist movements.<sup>6</sup> Gifford further asserted that these movements arose in the wake of the collapsed economic and political systems in Africa. The failure of nation-states created massive disillusionments and thus many Africans have no choice but to turn to these popular movements as a place of full participation and enthusiasm.<sup>7</sup> In order to understand the dynamics of these new popular movements as the largest civil society institution which for most part are situated in classrooms, cinemas, hotel conference rooms, a careful consideration of the socio-cultural, historical, political and economic dimensions must be sought. In tracing the origin, development and spread of African Initiated Churches, Bengt Sundkler recognized that African Initiated Churches seceded from the historic mission churches or has spilt among themselves. Andrew Walls in his essay "The Challenge of the African Initiated Churches" addressed this phenomenon but with a slight variation and said that "Nowadays most African churches are independent in the sense that their leadership or the ministry's outlook is overwhelmingly African with minimal missionary direction". But he added "except for those few countries with white settlement; there seem therefore no longer any obvious reasons for Ethiopian secessions as virtually all African churches are now Ethiopian."<sup>8</sup> In spite of the end of the Ethiopian motives in post independence Africa there is still continuous schisms and secessions, not predominately from the historic mission churches, but among



African Initiated Churches such as the Rhema Fellowship and the Eternity Worship Centre, a situation which gives rise to this research.

The third approach is the ecumenical approach which seeks to emphasize the contributions of all major denominations, Christian movements and races. John Baur's *Two Thousand Years of Christianity in Africa* and John Karanja *Founding an African Faith: Kikuyu Anglican Christianity 1900-1945* are excellent examples of the ecumenical approach. Adrian Hastings presented another classic example of this approach in his book: *A History of African Christianity 1950-1974* where he discussed the contributions of both historic mission churches and African Initiated Churches on equal footing. None of the above directly mentioned the history of the Eternity Worship Centre, since no one has specifically written on this. This approach may be limited in some respects in that it tends to be using Church history to push forward some ecumenical agenda as well as being critical of those churches and movements that have not joined the ecumenical movement.<sup>9</sup> In spite of its limitations, this approach has drawn the interest of the researcher, and he has patterned this study after this approach. This approach tells the whole story in a way that seeks to incorporate missionary and nationalist approaches.

Another approach was developed by Mark Shaw using the Kingdom framework. It seeks to emphasize how God is raising up witnesses to the theocratic, redemptive, and utopian aspects of his kingdom which is the key to understanding the variety of churches and religious movements that have made up the story of African Christianity.<sup>10</sup> This approach seeks to recognize witness borne by both historic mission churches and African Initiated Churches to the Kingdom of God in Africa.

The researcher used tools and techniques of narrative history. This resulted in consulting available books or documents in libraries and archives for relevant

materials. The Eternity Worship Centres, the Riruta Rhema Church, The Organization of African Initiated Churches archives will be used by the researcher for letters, logbooks, and records of minutes etc. as primary sources of information.

The researcher also utilized the rich resource of oral history, thus relying heavily on the memories of the founding members of the Eternity Worship Centre that are still alive. This research is qualitative not scientific in the sense of a laboratory inspired re-creation of the past, but rather, it attempts to tell a story about an aspect of the African past in the hope that the Africa of the present will gather more information concerning who she is and should endeavour to become. Since those with this information are rapidly passing on, this thesis puts into written form that story, thereby preserving it. To this end the researcher used open-ended interviews or unstructured questions with at least twelve persons responsible for the birth of the Eternity Worship Centre. These open-ended or unstructured questions are used to provoke the respondents to willingly tell their stories. The interviews were recorded on tape. In addition the researcher took notes whenever it was possible. These recorded interviews were transcribed, after which the information were synthesized to formulate the story of the Eternity Worship Centre. Since written records are more reliable this research relies on them for both background and primary information as much as possible. However, the researcher supplements the written sources with the resources of oral history. The oral sources were verified by comparing them with each other or written sources whenever possible. The tapes and transcriptions were deposited with the NEGST Library.

## END NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Falk, *The Growth of the Church in Africa* (Grand Rapids Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 442-460.

<sup>2</sup> Bengt Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 38.

<sup>3</sup> David Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968), 7.

<sup>4</sup> Harold W. Turner, *Religious Innovation in Africa* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1979), 92.

<sup>5</sup> F.B. Welbourn and B.A. Ogot, *A Place to Feel at Home: A Study of two Independent Churches in Western Kenya* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 1-8.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Gifford, ed., *New Dimensions in African Christianity* (Nairobi: All Conference of Churches, 1992), 1-3

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 4-6.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew F. Walls, "The Challenge of the African Independent Churches" in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 111-118.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Shaw, *Kingdom of God in Africa* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1996), 14.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 14-20.

## CHAPTER 2

### BACKGROUND OF CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA

Christianity has a strong claim as one of the oldest religions in Africa, and its roots go back as far as to the time of the Apostles. Six hundred years prior to the invasion of the Arabs the Church was already flourishing on the northern shore of the continent. Christianity did survive in Egypt but not without losses. The occupation of Egypt by the Arabs in 640 A.D. caused a big set back for the expansion of Christianity. North African Christianity on one hand witnessed the Donatist controversy which resulted to the decline of the faith by the sixteenth century but some Christian communities survived until the eighteenth century. An attempt to spiritually revive it ended in failure. A faith only lightly rooted in the culture faded into mere memory.<sup>1</sup> Nubian Christian Christianity grew for much of the middle ages until its demise in the fifteenth century. Ethiopian Christianity also underwent several cycles of renewal and emerged from the middle ages as the most vital of all the expressions of African Christianity.<sup>2</sup>

In the fifteenth century the continent experienced the period of Portuguese maritime explorations that brought Christianity to the western and eastern shores of Sub-Saharan Africa. What appears to be a big success took place in the sixteenth century when Christianity entered the Kongo.<sup>3</sup> The conversion of Monarch Alfonso Mvemba Nzinga demonstrated the extent to which African received the gospel.

The eighteenth century marks the Evangelical revival, the Great Awakening in America and Europe, with a new eschatology that envisioned the spread of



Christianity around the world as a prelude to Christ's personal return. Colonialism was on the rise, yet Christianity made enormous progress. Missionaries thrust from the coast into the interior of Africa.<sup>4</sup> The spread of Christianity during this period was not due exclusively to the missionary initiative. African converts, catechists and ministers zealously helped to spread Christianity. There were innumerable instances of African evangelists going outside of their own other ethnic groups to work as missionaries.<sup>5</sup> Local evangelists travelled widely. In fact in many areas of Uganda and western Kenya missionaries found local catechists and Christian homesteads already in place before they arrived. In the wake of this indigenous missionary movement, the Christian movement shifted subtly from that of a profoundly nineteenth century European Christianity to a twentieth century African one, rooted in vernacular Bibles and the development of African churches to come.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Rise and Traditional Explanations of African Independency**

African initiated churches were founded in great numbers between about 1914 and 1925, with a second wave of growth from the 1930s to the 1950s, followed by a third wave from the 1970s onwards. Each period, according to Jeff Haynes, is associated with multiple changes in Africa, reflective, first, of modernization and then of the impact of economic decline and social instability.<sup>7</sup>

The African response to Christianity could be seen from three dimensions: reception, rejection and re-interpretation. There were many Africans who received the new faith on the basis of their low status or disabilities in the African societies. These Africans gained hope by embracing Christianity as well as confidence and inspiration from the missionary teaching of equality and brotherhood. This does not in any way dismiss the fact that Christianity also won some African adherents of noble traditional

status in society such as chiefs and kings who assisted the missionaries to propagate the faith. Traditional rulers such as Lewanika and Lobengula king of Ndebele (in South Africa) gave assistance to missionaries.<sup>8</sup>

The second kind of response to Christianity was found among the group of Africans who rejected outright the message of Christianity and loyally remained attached to the religious traditions of their forefathers, seeing in them more meaning and significance than what the missionaries preached.

The third kind of response seen among the Africans was found among those who re-interpreted or adapted the faith. Africans in this category chose to adapt the new religion by founding what has come to be known as the African Initiated Churches. Bengt Sundkler, the pioneer in the studies of African Independency classified the phenomenon into two categories: "Ethiopian and Zionist types."

### **Ethiopianism**

According to Sundkler these were independent Bantu Churches that seceded from white mission churches chiefly on the basis of race, power and prestige. They are known for their emphasis on African self-improvement and political rights. Nehemiah Tile seceded from the Methodist Mission Church in 1882 and two years later founded the Tembu Church in South Africa, one of the first Independent churches ever to be founded in Africa. The second, which was the first to be called 'Ethiopian,' was founded by a Wesleyan minister Mokone in 1892 on the basis of racial segregation within the Wesleyan church. He used as his texts Ps. 68:31, "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God" and Acts 8:27(KJV). Characteristically, they are known to retain the patterns of their parent churches, though they would normally refuse to have anything to with the parent organizations.<sup>9</sup>

### **Zionism**

African Initiated Churches that fall within this category are referred to as Apostolic, Pentecostal, Faith or Spirit Churches. Leaders and followers of these churches refer to themselves as “*ama-Zionist*”, Zionists. These are Churches which arose between 1910 to the early 1930s and are churches that emphasize spiritual power. Historically, they have their roots in the Christian Catholic Church in Zion (Zion city, Illinois) United State. Ideologically they claim to emulate the Mount of Zion in Jerusalem. Sundkler asserted that theologically the Zionists are a more overtly syncretistic Bantu movement with a fusion or blending of traditional and Western religious ideas with healing, speaking with tongues, purification rites, and taboos as the main expressions of their faith.<sup>10</sup>

The explanations are not presumed to be exhaustive or definitive, especially in the face of AICs dynamic and a constant process of change. The first traditional explanation for the rise of the African Independency was that Christianity went hand in hand with the process of acculturation to the colonial order. The conversion of Africans was not limited to the Gospel alone, instead it was to a whole range of western values, including literacy, medicine, clerical and industrial education, town life, wage earning, and social mobility- as well as instilling in them distaste for traditional African values. The result of such conversion was intriguing as many Africans adopted a new identity based upon the colonial –Christian order. They became the new Africa leaders who were admitted to the junior ranks of the missionary and government hierarchies. The result of such conversions was that many Africans became frustrated with their subordinate positions especially in light of their suppressed equality as Christians, and began leanings towards independence. All of



these proved to be the writing on the wall (sign of dissatisfactions and disillusionments) and it did not take too long before African Christians asserted their independence. Some broke away from the mission establishment and founded churches of their own.<sup>11</sup> In essence this was an attempt by Africans to indigenize Christianity, involving forms of social mobilization and political resistance to European hegemony.

The second kind of traditional explanation was that most African Independent Churches arose as a result of disagreements between African Christians and western missionaries over the extent to which traditional African practices were permissible. This could be summed up as the mission churches' failure to deal with African's major concerns: sickness, health, fortune, misfortune. One practical example was the outbreak of the Christian revivalism in East Africa which came as a result of the inability to deal with what Africans perceived as the biggest threats to their well-being. As long as this African felt needs are not cared for, new groups will not cease to originate.

The third explanation has within it some elements of the first, but with specific emphasis on the racism of the mission churches. A practical example to illustrate this explanation would be the distinction between the missions, financed by donations from the west, and the so-called native churches which were locally supported. The result was widespread ill-feeling among African clergy. On the other hand some Protestant Churches were slower to ordain local men; this gave the appearance of trying to keep control of church affairs as a European prerogative. The obvious result was that many African clergy broke away from the parent churches to found their own religious organizations where they could be in positions of responsibility and power.



There is a fourth explanation which recognizes a strong relationship between independency and the translation of the Bible into the vernacular –especially the Old Testament. Barrett asserted that the correlation between the length of the period the people have had the Scriptures in their language has an inclination toward independence. The liberation the Scriptures bring to the individual and the opportunity they present to him to be in direct communion with Christ seen to have been interpreted to offer independence to him.<sup>12</sup>

The above factors which triggered independency in Africa in the past seem inadequate and therefore should be amended to fully explain the present religious phenomenon which emerged in Africa in the decade of the 80s. Adherents to the present new religious movements are not merely advocating the permission of neither African traditional practices nor reacting to missionary's paternalism, but are emphasizing the benefits of the Gospel in this life. They asserted that the massive disillusionment created by failure of nation-states, collapsed of economic and political systems can be overcome by Christ whose death has provided everything.

### **Planting of the Church in Kenya**

The history of the planting of Christianity in Kenya as well as its expansion is similar to the planting of the Church in any part of Africa. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century an attempt was made by the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama who had in his company several Catholic Missionaries. This initial planting was unsuccessful due to the tensions between the Portuguese and the Arabs.<sup>13</sup> A second attempt was made in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the arrival of Protestant pioneers. In 1844, a German Lutheran preacher employed by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) of London, Johann Ludwig Krapf, landed at Mombassa and thus the modern era of Christianity in East

Africa began. Except for Fort Jesus and some remnants of church buildings erected by the Portuguese, there were no traces of the earlier period.<sup>14</sup>

The largest Protestant body in Kenya is the Africa Inland Mission/Church. In 1895, the Lord gave Peter Cameron Scott a vision for reaching the interiors of Africa. His persuasions and passions for God's love led him to found the Africa Inland Mission, a largely American, ecumenical mission which drew its missionaries from many different denominations and cooperated with all evangelical missionary societies on the field.<sup>15</sup>

On December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1896, Peter Cameron Scott laid down the task that he had vigorously undertaken. He was buried at Nzau in the land of the Akamba tribe. The grain of wheat did not remain alone.<sup>16</sup> African Inland Mission/Church do not forsake the vision of its founder as it continued to plant churches and it serves the people of Kenya with great passion. Many Africans have continued to respond to the story of the kingdom and become part of Church reaching out to their fellow Africans. African evangelists understood the relevance of the Christian message to their own lives, and they could preach it forcefully to their kinsmen.

### **African Initiated Churches in Kenya**

The rise of African Independency in East and Central Africa was a reaction against land occupation of the white settlers. In Kenya the majority of the independent churches are located in Western Kenya among the Luo and Luyia peoples.<sup>17</sup> In 1902, this area was transferred to Kenya from the Ugandan protectorate, the year Christian missionaries reached the area. In spite of the high presence and positive response to Christian missionaries in Western Kenya, it was the scene of high proliferations of Independent Churches. The first group that heralded the secession movement was

*Mumboism* which was a politico-religious movement introduced by Oyango Dunde. The first Independent Church in Kenya came into being in 1914 when a Catholic seminarian left the CMS mission to form the Nomiya Luo Mission.<sup>18</sup>

Jocelyn Murray described varieties of Kikuyu Independent Churches in Kenya on the basis of theology and history, and subsequently divided them into four categories: nationalist, secessionist, spirit, and revival pentecostal churches. She asserted that they arose for diverse reasons: political, educational and cultural struggles, anxiety over land, resentment over attempts at forced cultural change, policy or leadership, self-determination in religious practices etc.<sup>19</sup>

The confidence in pre-independence Africa could not be sustained in the decade of the 1980s. It presupposes that the presence of the growth and spread of urbanization, modern education, economic development, scientific rationality and social mobility would significantly diminish the socio-political position of religion. This provides new explanation that in spite of the end of colonialism; such anti-hegemonic religious vehicles did not die out.

## END NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> A. Adu Boahen. ed. *General History of Africa Vol. VII: Africa under Colonial Domination 1880-1935* (Paris: UNESCO, 1985), 512-513.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Shaw, *Kingdom of God in Africa: A Short History of African Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker House Company, 1996), 80-81.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 17-18.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 42-50.

<sup>5</sup> Lamin Senneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact* (London: C. Hurst and Company, 1983), xii-xiii. The bulk of the work of evangelizing Africa was done by Africans themselves. For instance the extension of mission to Abeokuta and Badagry or the ill-rewarded toils of a saint in the Gambia have been by African instrumentality. The same could be said of the Niger Mission, not to mention the spectacular instances of the movements founded by the Prophets William Wade Harris and Garrick Briade of Liberia.

<sup>6</sup> A. Adu Boahen , 2000-2007

<sup>7</sup> Jeff Haynes, *Religion and Politics in Africa* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd., 1996), 44-48.

<sup>8</sup> A. Adu Boahen, 2001-2008

<sup>9</sup> Bengt Sunkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1948), 53-55.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 56-57.

<sup>11</sup> Benjamin C. Ray, *African Religions: Symbols, Rituals, and Community* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1976), 193-194.

<sup>12</sup> David Barret, *Schism and Renewal in Africa* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968).  
1-7.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>14</sup> David Barrett, ed., *Kenya Churches Handbook: The Development of Kenyan Christianity 1498-1973* (Kisumu Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1973), 29-39.



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<sup>15</sup> Titus B. Kivunzi, interview by author, October 18, 2003, Nairobi, tape recording and notes.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> David Barrett, 5-7.

<sup>18</sup> John Zalon Nthamburi. *A History of the Methodist Church in Kenya* (Nairobi: Uzima Press Limited, 1982), 16.

<sup>19</sup> Jocelyn Murray, ed. "Varieties of Kikuyu Independent Churches" in *Kenya Churches Handbook: The Development of Kenya Christianity 1498-1973* (Kisumu Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1973), 128-134.

### CHAPTER 3

#### THE RISE OF NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN AFRICA

The decade of the 1980s saw the proliferation of new religious movements in African Christianity south of the Sahara. This phenomenon cannot fully be explained using the traditional theory of African Independency. Paul Gifford's recent studies attempt to explore the dynamic factors which were behind these popular religions. These newer Pentecostal groups, ministries, churches, para-church organizations and radical student groups are found in major cities of Africa like Pretoria, Monrovia, Lagos or Nairobi. In addition to the cities, these groups are also found in major rural cities. Churches such as the African Christians Fellowship International (ACFI) of Bishop T. Edward Kofi of Liberia, Redeemed Gospel Church (RGC) of Bishop Arthur C. Gitonga in Kenya, Bethel World Outreach Centre (BWOC) of Bishop Darlington Johnson of Liberia, and Idahosa's Church of God Mission International (CGMI) in Nigeria are all classic examples of the new religious movements in Africa. These churches did not exist twenty years ago, but have become mega-churches in the space of a few years with a very high profile. One of the distinct features of these popular religious movements is that they are promoted through literature, workshops, Bible colleges, revivals, power conferences and crusades.<sup>1</sup>

Ogbu U. Kalu in the Article "The third Response: Pentecostalism and the Reconstruction of Christian Experience in Africa 1970-1995," referred to this as a third response which has emerged in African Christianity. He further asserted that "at first, it was perceived within the Zionist Aladura tradition but since the 1970s, its different strands have become more perceptible. Its international character, as well as

its local rooting, phenomenal growth and radical challenge to mainline churches, have puzzled scholars”.<sup>2</sup>

In order to understand the different strands Kalu and others attempt to describe, it is significant to probe into the dynamic factors that gave rise to these groups. Historically analyzing the social, political, economic and religious situations prevailing in Africa in the decade of the 1980s would give us significant insight into this fresh religious phenomenon.

Popular religions in Africa blossomed in the wake of the increasing social, political and economic collapse. This was a period of general collapse in the area of economics, infrastructures, education and health in Africa. By any standards of reckoning- statistics for life expectancy, child mortality, health education, GDP – Africa fell well behind the other developing areas of the world. Nigeria for instance, witnessed at the end of President Ibriham Babangida’s tenure in mid-1993 that the real income per head was one tenth of what it was when he came to power eight years earlier. In a Francophone country such as Cameroon, the income per head fell by half between 1985 and 1993, even before the devaluation of the CFA franc in early 1994. The continent according to Paul Gifford was “slipping out of the Third World and into its own bleak category”.<sup>3</sup>

The last two decades also witnessed the period of international isolation of Africa. Africa was being marginalized by the countries of the West. For instance western media at that time gave much coverage to the war in Bosnia and neglected the carnage and genocides in Angola and Rwanda. It was a ‘decade of disaster’.<sup>4</sup> It was a disaster not only in terms of lives lost but also in terms of the suffering and misery experienced. Hopes which were nurtured in the struggle for independence went unfulfilled, and promises that were once thought to be dear betrayed. Trust that had

been forged in the face of the enemy was exploited.<sup>5</sup> Political instability and the desire of the elites to maintain their hold on their societies have led to an unprecedented militarization of the continent. Military dictatorships have continued to unleash reigns of terror and mindless violence in many countries.

The political instability was exacerbated by a social factor of dislocations in African family life which resulted in external and internal pressures. These pressures greatly affected traditional family and community life. The extended family found in the rural environment was being fractured by the economic and social patterns emerging in the decade. Of course, this came as a result of exodus to urban centres and separated family members culturally as well as geographically thus weakening the cohesion and interdependence of the extended family.<sup>6</sup>

Popular religion also emerged as a result of a missionary explosion on the religious landscape. The period witnessed the immense decrease in mainline Protestant missionaries' activities and the subsequent increase of new Pentecostal missionaries. Many of the missionaries in this explosion were closely linked to the charismatic/fundamentalist Christianity of the southern states of America, and their concern was with pure and simple evangelization. These close links with many charismatic/fundamentalist groups in North America simply gave the movement another unique feature and explanation. It is difficult to classify these newer Pentecostal movements as truly African or Western Christianity.

A classic example is the African Christians Fellowship International (an Independent Bible Believing Church) in which the writer is a pastor. It has been positively influenced over the past 18 years by Full Gospel preacher, Bishop Alfred Jackson of the Tabernacle of Praise Full Gospel Church, of Rock Hill, South Carolina, U.S.A., yet the ACFI has succeeded in maintaining its indigenous Christianity and



cultural expressions as an African Church. But this may not be the case with the Transcea Bible Church in Liberia that had a complex message. The Transcea Bible Church, though founded in Africa, is completely western, and there is not a single African element found within this Church. The pastor's attitude to things African was made plain in his decision to abolish drums and dancing as "purely African culture (and therefore) inconsistent with the Bible."<sup>7</sup>

A paper delivered at World Council of Churches General Assembly in Harare Zimbabwe, openly refused to accept these groups as part of the African Initiated Churches on the basis of the following:

"These African initiated churches have come into Africa through the American international evangelists. They behave like their American brothers, speak in English with an American slant, hold crusades with very loud music and have interpreters from one language to another. These groups commonly known as Prosperity Gospel Churches are very opposed to any ecumenical involvement and would want to work alone. This group has not been easy to approach and hence cannot be members of Organization of African Instituted Churches. They don't wear anything special as they dress in suits and ties and prefer to do their evangelism through national radios and televisions."<sup>8</sup>

The refusal of many to accept the new religious movements as part of African Initiated Churches has created a basis for amending the traditional theory in order to fully explain the new religious movement unfolding on the religious landscape of Africa. African Initiated Churches( as the name depicts) for the most part originated in Africa as an answer to the quest of identifying Christianity with African culture or largely in protest over some form of authority, or in order to find fulfilment of a spiritual thirst outside of mission form of Christianity.

The explosion of new Pentecostal churches in the decade of 1980s took place at the expense of both the Historic Mission and the traditional African Independent

Churches. The Historic Mission Churches had become weak for several factors: First, because the churches have often been among the most significant institutions in a country, governments have expended particular efforts to ensure that the churches support them, or at least did not threaten them. Thus governments attempted to win churches, to buy them off with favours and privileges, and to force them into line if resistance was displayed. Thus many churches in many African countries effectively lost much of their independence. Secondly, Historic Mission Churches have been greatly influenced by the 'Big Man' model of leadership which has characterized African regimes. In many cases they have effectively adopted this 'Big Man' model themselves. Not a few churches, too, have been run by people who understood their job primarily in terms of their own power, status and wealth; whose desire to preserve their position led them to flout constitutions and rig elections, or to dispense funds in such a way as to buy support. They have stifled all opposition. They have allocated funds to their own regions; they have given important jobs to family members.<sup>9</sup>

Traditional African Initiated Churches also lose members to these new religious movements as a result of bitter infighting. For instance the umbrella organization in Nairobi, the Association of African Instituted Churches, effectively ceased to function in the late 1980s after prolonged and particularly bitter internal dissensions. Many Traditional African Initiated churches have suffered a loss of confidence; many sought affiliation with churches overseas, drawn by offers of scholarships, education and general support. Many moved into the orbit of the new Pentecostal fellowships and associations.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, many people were drawn to the newer Pentecostal churches when they realized that many traditional African Initiated Churches were supporting corrupt and dictatorial regimes in Africa. Their failure to offer a radical alternative society in an

increasing polarized society provides a high possibility for many more members to migrate to the newer Pentecostal churches mushrooming in their proximity. The situation varies from one African country to another. In some African countries, the newer Pentecostal churches also supported corrupt and dictatorial governments. For instance in Kenya in 1980s when all opposition political activity was banned, the leaders of the opposition were effectively churchmen: the Anglican Bishops Gitari, Muge and Okullu, and the Presbyterian Timothy Nyoja. The Catholic Bishops began to play a similar role at the end of the decade. On the other hand some mainline and newer Pentecostal churches like the Redeemed Gospel Church, and the Seventh Day Adventist were giving invaluable support to the government of the day.<sup>11</sup> The reason for such support by some newer Pentecostal and Mainline churches could be explained in terms of their desire for the respectability conferred by government recognition, and for the material rewards a well-disposed president can dispense. Secondly, if they decide to mediate in political conflict between different political factions, their purpose is to “settle intra-elite disputes between those seeking state power, rather than between those involved in wider societal conflict involving upper and subordinate class forces”.<sup>12</sup> Whatever they did in the course of their demands for reforms they were so careful not to cause or appear to cause or encourage the instability of the nation. They were so concerned about stability of their allies the political elite. These examples also indicate the ambiguous political role that Christianity has played in Africa’s recent political restructuring.

In the face of the above, the choice for life survival over against death, needed to be made more urgently than ever before. It was in the context of this rapid decline, international indifference, and the situations unfolding within both Historic and traditional African Initiated Churches that African Christianity has experienced



the rise of these new religious movements. This current religious explosion is an ardent desire by the common man to create a counter-ideology and alternative political space in response to the totalitarian ambitions of African dictators. Whatever temporal answers that a source seeks to provide to African daily problems, the best option is the kingdom of God in Africa which provides a deep concern and alternative for African plight. I. Kabongo, reflecting on the bleak, unpromising economic and political reality in Africa, concluded that popular religions often express themselves in response to apparent hopelessness, reflecting the lack of expectations of the mass of the people, where religious faith is regarded as the key to this worldly material favour.

He further asserted:

“Africa at prayer looks for a miracle; it is a daily appeal for the ultimate solution to illness, poverty, and misery. That is Africa of the night, of Saturdays and Sundays. Africa of the week and of the day ‘manages’, and corrupt and corrupting individuals die between the two worlds, struggling to survive.”<sup>13</sup>

Popular religions emerged as direct results of prevailing situations in Africa in the decade of the 1980s such as: legitimacy crisis, economic stagnation, fractured family, community and environmental degradation. These faceless, oppressed and marginalized Africans could not continue to interpret the Bible and Christianity along the traditional way and manner as we have interpreted it from Europe and America. Both trained and untrained laymen with strong passion and desire to properly contextualize the message of the gospel to African situations emerged as leaders to champion the cause of the weak, poor, oppressed and disadvantaged. These are not traditional African Initiated churches per se as the distinct history and theology can not fit the traditional explanations of the AICs. They are not reacting to European paternalism, Colonialism or racism as was in the case of former apartheid South



Africa; instead these are new religious movements within African Christianity south of the Sahara responding to realities facing the continent and its people.<sup>14</sup>

These newer Pentecostal churches provided something new and important for the situation of the day. They provided voluntary associations of true brothers and sisters with a new organizational style. This new community provided free social space. Here members found shelter, psychological security and solidarity. In this new association they created a new world, a new existence for themselves, away from the harsh and brutalizing realities of their former existence. In this new world they can forged a new notion of self, for here they began to make personal decisions.<sup>15</sup>

The churches such as Bethel and the Transcontinental Evangelical Association Church (Transcea) in Liberia provided similar hope for many Liberians in the decade of the 80s. The story and appeal of both churches can be better understood in the social context as Liberia proceeded in the 1980s. Liberia was at the verge of collapse and slipping into a state of demise. Corruption was at its highest peak. There were food and fuel shortages all over the country. Infrastructure crumbled as unemployment soared and freedom of speech was severely curtailed. The Country GDP declined by an average of about 2.8% annually in 1980-1985, and continues to decline. In such circumstances these churches played definite social roles. First, in a world of uncertainty, insecurity, bewilderment, both churches offered certainty. This certainty was embodied in the pastor. The pastor offered the appearance of total competence. Secondly, to join these churches was to move into an alternative society. Belonging to these churches was not a Sunday morning activity, which Christianity was for most Liberia's nominal mainline Christians. At Bethel, newcomers were surrounded at a special point in the service, encircled and sung to. Thirdly, these churches covered every aspect of existence.<sup>16</sup> In the small area they have marked out for themselves,

they can be free agents, responsible beings. They develop a sense of their own importance. They interact as equals. Here they learn patterns of discipline and independence. They shed their passivity and entertain goals and ambitions. Some even find leadership and responsibility.<sup>17</sup>

The new explanation in African independency was seen within the Neo-Pentecostal churches. It is a straightforward appeal to its adherents that if you have enough faith, everything you want will come to you. It is a paradigm shift from the traditional explanation. Many Africans move from the mainstream Christian churches because they are not being fulfilled spiritually.

### **Rhema Fellowship**

Kenya in the decade of the 1980s was not spared from these social, political, economic and religious realities unfolding on the continent of Africa. The Justice and Peace Commission of the Church of the Province of Kenya (CPK) captured the prevailing realities of Kenya in the decade of the 1980s as reflected in the pastoral letter issued:

“Fear was the order of the day and before very long that fear became a new culture in the national life- culture of fear. Other institutions which were critical of the government were also intimidated and some succumbed to silence. In the final analysis it appeared as if only the Church and the Law society had the courage to speak on behalf of the people.”<sup>18</sup>

These realities gave rise to the dynamic explosions of new Pentecostal Churches which provided an alternative society. Many newer Pentecostal churches which emerged have either seceded from traditional African Initiated Churches or spilt among themselves.

The history of the Eternity Worship Centre is deeply rooted in Rhema Fellowship, a parent Church to the Eternity Worship Centre. In 1989, Pastor Richard

Kioko Kimwele seceded from the Redeemed Gospel Church of Bishop Arthur C. Gitonga to establish the Rhema Fellowship (Revealed Word) in Kawangware, Nairobi, Kenya. Pastor Kimwele was associated with the Redeemed Gospel Church for a protracted period of time.<sup>19</sup> There were several factors which contributed to Kimwele's secession from the Redeemed Gospel Church. One of the overriding factors was Bishop Gitonga's unfeigned and open support of the Government which was determined to keep Kenya as a one party state against the public outcry for multi-party democracy. The Bishop's support was reflected in one of his many sermons:

'In heaven it is just like Kenya has been for many years. There is only one Party- and God never makes a mistake'. He continued: 'President Moi has been appointed by God to lead the country, and Kenyans should be grateful for the peace prevailing... We have freedom of worship, we can pray and sing in any way we want. What else do we need? That's all we need.'<sup>20</sup>

Rhema Fellowship had no buildings of its own, and rented schoolrooms every Sunday in Riruta Satellite. This was a common phenomenon among many newer Pentecostal churches; they are commonly situated in classrooms, movie theatres, hotel conference rooms etc. in big cities around Africa. Rhema Fellowship drew its membership from the ordinary people and therefore was closer to the social, community and material needs of the people.

In 1992, Charles Kaloki, a convert and discipled member of the African Inland Church in Kutui, realized the challenges faced by Pastor Kimwele (his cousin) in fostering the vision of the Rhema Fellowship. These constraints led him to join his cousin's vision in the same year.<sup>21</sup>

A large number of the congregation at Rhema seemed young and ambitious; as a respondent asserted that they raised funds (Kiswahili *harambee*) to purchase a piece of property to erect the Church. Kaloki and his family contributed the bulk of the money to purchase the property for the Church.<sup>22</sup> Rhema Fellowship grew from a



single Church at Riruta Satellite to about fifteen churches in Kenya with branches in Kutui, Malaba, Karen, Nairobi, and Kawangware. Adherents to the message of the newer Pentecostal churches were Africans desiring to achieve a religious satisfaction that was not forthcoming from a mainstream religion. Besides, this was done as a means of solving a number of personal and community problems, some of which concern material issues and alternative political space.

In March 1997, James Mwangangi informed the leadership of the Rhema Fellowship of his burden to reach the elites and educated people of Karen, Nairobi. Mwangangi's vision was shared by Pastors Charles Kaloki, and Nicholas Munyi. James Mwangangi was then a student at the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST), in Karen, Nairobi, and serving with the Rhema Fellowship as an Evangelist. The pioneering work at Karen was started by these three men with the help of NEGST. The School provided a van and a public address system for the conduct of the first open air meeting in Karen. This initially was a hard task because Karen was perceived as the land of elites, wealthy and educated who many thought had no need for the Gospel. The Church began in the Sixems Hotel in the centre of Karen Shopping centre as a branch of the Rhema Fellowship.<sup>23</sup> Mwangangi did not fully realize his vision for Karen, as he took a new assignment with the Nairobi Chapel upon graduation in 1998. He died a year later at the Nairobi Chapel.<sup>24</sup>

As a result of the open air meeting conducted at Karen the first three converts of the Church (Patrick Karimi, Leah Waniah, and Mrs. Sauli) were made. These three new members were ordinary Kenyans of low status in the community. They were soon added to the pioneering members from the Rhema Fellowship at Riruta Satellite. The Church in Karen grew very slowly in the first year of its existence. In the second year it grew into the membership of thirty-five. The growth of the Church brought



added responsibilities to the pioneers. In order to live up to the challenges, some pastors had to let go their jobs to give their full time to the young Church.

In early 1999 an internal rift, a new phenomenon, invaded the rank and file of the leadership of this young fellowship. Leadership crises, an age old besetting sin of African Christianity which normally results in strained relationships was now present among the leaders. According to a respondent who was in the crisis, the young Church at Karen began to witness mistrust, love of power and prestige, character defamations etc. among its leadership.<sup>25</sup> The word of the famous African writer Chinua Achebe would simply illustrate the fragile situation prevailing among this young congregation: "Things fall apart when the centre cannot hold."<sup>26</sup>

### **Eternity Worship Centre**

In addition to the old traditional explanation of African independency, aspects of which triggered the emergence of the Eternity Worship, the new dynamic factors which give a new or amended explanation of African independency were also evident in the early history of the Eternity Worship Centre. Kenya like many other countries in Africa was also experiencing the effect of the increase social, political and economic collapse of the 1980s which created massive disillusionment for many Africans. Many Kenyans were frustrated with KANU perpetuating itself in power. Massive and unbridled corruption was being witnessed in the ruling clique. Apparent failures of both Historic Mission and traditional African Independent Churches to champion the cause of the poor and needy led to the migration of many to the newer Pentecostal churches such as the Eternity Worship Centre. Many Church leaders have also adopted the 'Big man' model, a desire to preserve their position. This situation has also triggered new wave of the religious movements.

Scott Strauss commented on the disillusionment of the masses expressed in the new phenomenon within African Christianity:

“They come to Nairobi’s movie theatres and public parks every day at lunch time, with God and Africa’s modern problems on their minds. They are Kenyans, mostly professional but barely middle class, who have watched their rent, food prices and the cost of health care and education rise every year as the city around them deteriorates. These Kenyans are not turning to politicians or mainstream churches to solve their problems. Instead, they are dedicating themselves to Jesus Christ and putting their faith in a new wave of born again Christianity that promises heaven on earth”<sup>27</sup>

On Sunday March 4, 1999, Pastor Kaloki along with majority of the members quit the Rhema Fellowship to establish the Eternity Worship Centre. This came as a result of numerous unsolved internal conflicts and other prevailing dynamic factors. The day of his departure was not pleasant. The climate was not conducive. One respondent says Kaloki and those with him in his camp had decided to prevent Bishop Richard Kimwele from announcing Pastor Kaloki’s suspension. But many respondents at the Eternity Worship Centre disagree with this claim.<sup>28</sup> One respondent, who witnessed the crisis on the day of Pastor Kaloki’s departure, claimed that the Bishop, who has not frequented the Church, had probably come to visit with the Karen Rhema Church with the mind of settling the disputes among its leadership. Asst. Pastor Munyi has accused Pastor Kaloki of unilaterally imposing on the young church another pastor. Munyi’s dissatisfaction led him to make a formal complaint to the Bishop of the Church.<sup>29</sup> The Bishop upon his arrival at the Karen Church met Kaloki making an announcement on his departure.<sup>30</sup> At this point the Bishop in a strong worded statement asked Pastor Kaloki to “stop speaking and sit down.” The Pastor pleaded with him “kindly allow me to complete my announcement and you can have the pulpit.” Emotions flared up and immediately the Bishop grabbed the Pastor

by his collar to force him out of the pulpit. In the midst of the confusion the Bishop threw out an open challenge for any one wishing to follow the Pastor to do so. At this point ninety-five percent of the membership walked out to follow the Pastor. This was the birth of the Eternity Worship Centre. The good relationship that previously existed among the Church leaders had been marred by the wrangles. These were the parting words of Pastor Kaloki:

“Pastor Munyi has fought me in many ways. He does not want to listen to me even his wife has become so bitter with us. Pastor Munyi has accused us before the Bishop. We have supported Munyi throughout even when the Church was small. Bishop Kimwele has accused me of many things which I have not done, after sitting I have forgiven him. Suspension letter was prepared. Without love, truth we can't work. The times say I am not wanted in Rhema. I love, stood with Bishop in truth faithfully for seven years. I have nothing against Rhema but since I am not wanted I will not fight but leave peacefully and do that which the Lord has called me to do.”<sup>31</sup>

The secession of Eternity from Rhema fellowship was viewed by members in the crisis from two schools of thought. According to one view, some members were definitely unhappy with the conflict that suddenly shattered their hopes in this new fellowship. These members could not explain why a young church would experience early dissensions among its leadership. On the other hand there were other members who had an optimistic view about the crisis. They saw the hands of God at work in the episode. It was a challenge and so they embraced it with courage and sought the Lord for a new direction. Members in this group defended their action for separating from the Rhema Fellowship by saying: “we did not secede from Rhema Fellowship instead we were thrown out.”<sup>32</sup>

The week of the crisis was a challenge for the leader and his followers. Major decisions regarding relocation, the fate of the new congregation and reorganization were to be made. In the wake of all these numerous challenges the young Church

according to one of the respondents was driven to spend countless hours in prayer every Saturday at Ngong hills in Karen.<sup>33</sup> The first service was held at the Continental College of catering on Sunday March 14, 1999. These were the members present on the first day of service (Pastor Charles Kaloki, Evangelist David Marlombe and family, Pastor Ben Wambua and his family, Willy Kimonyo, Mrs. & Mrs. Chris Kimani, Shilla Njeri, Leah Wania, John Marlombe, Rachel Indakwa, Patrick Kiriimi, and Titus Kyalo). As one of the distinct features of the new religious movements in Africa, Eternity Worship Centre met in the early days of her establishment in homes, hotels, under trees, and on porches. In June 2002, the Church was finally relocated on a piece of property she purchased at Karen Brooks.



## END NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Gifford, *New Dimensions in African Christianity* (Kenya: All Africa Conference of Churches, 1992), 1-3.

<sup>2</sup> Ogbu U. Kalu, "The Third Response: Pentecostalism and the Reconstruction of Christian Experience in Africa", 1970-1995 in *Journal of African Christian Thought* Vol. 1 No. 2 (December 1998): 3.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Gifford, "Some Recent Developments in African Christianity" *African Affairs*, October Vol.93 No. 373 ( 1994):513

<sup>4</sup> Jeff Haynes, *Religion and Politics in Africa* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd, 1996), 83.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 83-85.

<sup>6</sup> Kalu, 4-5.

<sup>7</sup> Gifford, 38-52.

<sup>8</sup> Archbishop Njeru Wambugu "The Mission of African Instituted Churches" World Council of Churches General Assembly, Harare Zimbabwe, (December 1998),4.

<sup>9</sup> Gifford, 9.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 14

<sup>11</sup> David Throup, "Render unto Caesar the Things that are Caesar's: The Politics of Church-State Conflict in Kenya 1978-1990 in *Religion and Politics in East Africa* ( Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1995), 143-153.

<sup>12</sup> I. Kabongo, 'Derountante Afrique ou la Syncope d'un Discours', *Reune Candiene des Etudes 'Africaines*, vol. X VIII, no. 1, 13-22. quoted in Jeff Haynes, *Religion and Politics in Africa*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> Jeff Haynes, 139-141.

<sup>14</sup> Gifford, 4-6.

<sup>15</sup> Gifford, 29.

<sup>16</sup> Gifford, 38-48.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 38-39.

<sup>18</sup> CPK Justice and Peace Commission, “A pastoral letter to all CPK congregations” Nairobi: Easter 1992, p.16. The letter was signed by Archbishop Kuria and Bishops Okullu and Gitari in the name of the CPK episcopate.

<sup>19</sup> Nicholas Muny, Pastor, Living Water Church, interview by researcher, Feb. 5, 2004. Nairobi. Tape recording and notes. Munyi was Pastor of the Rhema Fellowship at the time of the crises. He later seceded from the Fellowship to start the Living Water Church in Ngong, Nairobi. He was an active participant during crisis which give birth to the Eternity Worship Centre.

<sup>20</sup> Gifford, 17-18.

<sup>21</sup> David Marlonbe, interview by researcher, September 14, 2003, Nairobi. Tape recording and notes.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Enosh Anguanda, “A Class Presentation MS 542 African Independent Churches”. Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology, (June 21, 2001): 1-5.

<sup>24</sup> “Alumni Directory” in Special 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Issue the NEGST Step to Graduation Edition 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Ann David, interview by the researcher, September 14, 2003. Nairobi. Tape recording and notes.

<sup>26</sup> Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* ( Nairobi: William Heinemann Ltd., 1958), 1

<sup>27</sup> Scott Strauss “Toronto’s Globe and Mall (28/10/96:A14). Quoted in Ogbu U. Kalu, the Third Response: Pentecostalism and the Reconstruction of Christian Experience in Africa, 1970-1995. *Journal of African Christian Thought* Vol. 1 No.2 (December 1996), 13.

<sup>28</sup> Josephine N’gang’a, interview by the researcher, January 25, 2004. Nairobi. Notes. She was one of the few members that remained in Rhema Fellowship after the spilt, but later defected to join the Karen Faith Chapel of Pastor Leonard Muyelee

<sup>29</sup> Nicholas Munyi

<sup>30</sup> Ann David, interview by the researcher, September 14, 2003. Nairobi. Tape Recording and notes.

<sup>31</sup> “Copy of the Sermon preached on Sunday March 4, 1999, Nairobi: Eternity Worship Centre Library. The statement of Pastor Charles Kaloki was not edited for the sake of its original content. The document was partly torn as a result of the physical

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fight between Pastor Kaloki and Bishop Kimwele. The Eternity Worship Centre has deposited this historic document in the Church library.

<sup>32</sup> Marim Mbevi, interview by the researcher, September 21, 2003. Nairobi. Tape recording and notes.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS AND INFLUENCES ON THE ETERNITY WORSHIP CENTRE

The early history of Eternity Worship Centre revealed a number of internal and external influences by various religious groups such as: Africa Inland Church, the traditional African Initiated Churches and newer Pentecostal movements. According to a respondent, most of the pioneers of the Eternity Worship Centre were once members of the Africa Inland Church. In 1972, four missionaries were sent out by the AIC Evangelistic missionary society of Kenyans to Turkana, Kutui and Itole (Orma tribe), Tana River, and Garissa areas.<sup>1</sup> Pastor Charles Kaloki, founder and senior pastor of Eternity Centre was introduced to Christ when the Africa Inland Mission reached the interior of Kamba land (Kutui).<sup>2</sup> Titus Kivunzi, the former Bishop of the African Inland Church, describes the Church's approach to evangelistic ministry:

“Africa Inland Church left a good foundation. We do not play games with faith. We trusted God. We taught the Word seriously according to the biblical meaning (the author's intention). We preached the Word which is Bible based. We host collective conferences as well as for women, youth, men and we select chosen person to teach. We select various topics such as sin, purity, Church growth, giving, faith, money” etc.<sup>3</sup>

The African Inland Church had a very firm foundation among its adherents in the rural areas of Kenya for several years prior to moving to Nairobi. One of the pioneers of the Eternity Worship who was positively affected by the ministry of the AIC in Kutui confirmed the impact in these words: “the African Inland Church believed, taught and lived the Word.”<sup>4</sup> A strong emphasis was placed on holy living and strict adherence to the Bible. Effective Church discipline was another true mark of the African Inland Church.



But the delay in moving to Nairobi resulted in another impact on many of its members who had migrated into Nairobi for better jobs or education.<sup>5</sup> A respondent described such transition as a normal process occurring among many church members in Kenya as a result of a new wave of Pentecostalism sweeping the religious landscape. Many of the pioneers of the Eternity Worship Centre, who left the AIC-Kutui for Nairobi, organized themselves into a team known as “reckoning team”.<sup>6</sup> This group of young men was believed to cause revival within Kutui AIC. In the words of a respondent “whatever we saw from the outside and we felt that it was helpful to build up our people (members of the Kutui –AIC) spiritually we borrowed and brought back home”. Many pioneers of the Eternity Worship Centre including Pastor Charles Kaloki were among those who migrated from the AIC to these newer Pentecostal movements.

### **Influences of the newer Pentecostal movements**

As young men and women left rural parts of Kenya for Nairobi, they came in direct contact with a new religious phenomenon or popular religion described by a respondent as “the fire of Pentecostalism”.<sup>7</sup> These churches attempted to reintegrate the migrants into a meaningful, social environment where specific rituals and social relations recalled the life lived in the village, and secondly, they dealt with personal afflictions that stem from both traditional conceptions and living under city conditions.

The roots of Pentecostalism in Kenya go back as far as 1910. Pentecostalism was strong in Western Kenya as well as in other parts of the country. The two most important communities are the Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG) and the Pentecostal Evangelistic Fellowship of Africa (PEFA).<sup>8</sup>

There is no doubt that the Revival movement in East Africa also contributed to the spiritual ethos underlying the New Religious Movements. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Revival movement spread throughout Kenya and East Africa. It remained a powerful spiritual movement that affected the religious climate of the country. The Revival provided a backdrop for new, personal initiatives in religion.<sup>9</sup>

A new religious phenomenon (Charismatic/ popular religion /newer Pentecostal churches) first appeared on the Kenyan religious landscape in the 1980s and 1990s among the Christian Unions. They took their origin in forms of mass evangelism which were appearing in the southern states of the U.S.A. and latterly in the shape of televangelism.<sup>10</sup> It links a number of national Christian unions and helps, to facilitate the spread of the Charismatic renewal across the borders. This new wave of Pentecostalism emphasizes radical commitment to Christ and appeals to the educated, poor, urban elite and reflects an effort to cope with African urban life. New religious movements made a tremendous impact on Kenyans because of the social, political and economic circumstances that were prevailing at the time.

The appeal was in line with the vision of the Eternity Worship Centre which is to reach both the poor, and the elite and educated urban people of Karen. Most leaders of these movements were initially exposed to the Pentecostal/Charismatic persuasions on University campuses in Christian Unions, Scripture Union, and Fellowship of Christian Unions (FOCUS) etc. Charismatic movements have caused a substantial Christian awakening in Africa, and have attracted and influenced millions of young people.

The Africa Inland Church in Kutui was not spared from this new wave of Pentecostalism or popular religion as sons and daughters from AIC- Kutui returned from Nairobi with what an Elder of the AIC referred to as a 'strange doctrine'. The

result of this migration from the Africa Inland Church means that AIC was expected to lose some of its members to these new religious movements. Titus Kivunzi clearly describes the transitions or migrations from the Inland Church.

There have been several impacts over the years from different circles such as the Pentecostal movement like the East African Revival that engulfed the whole of East Africa. The younger generation began to feel that the Church was growing cold simply because they were not allowed to do certain things such as shouting, clapping hands, dancing, claiming to be speaking in tongues, as they were under controlled and selective teaching. The Church grew in heavy dose of teaching and the young people needed more of that. As a result of these and the influence of Pentecostalism, young people felt that they need freedom and they left that because they don't want to be under bondage. This is naive.<sup>11</sup>

Kevin Ward vividly captures the religious landscape of Africa in the last decades as an 'explosion of new Pentecostal Churches' but also as religious or popular movements 'manufactured' outside of Africa.<sup>12</sup> At one level Kevin Ward believes that this is an example of the Americanization of culture on a world-wide basis, a re-alienation of the African Church under the influence of the strident and uncompromising tenets of the American religious Right. American evangelical money and personnel, para-Church evangelistic 'ministries', cheap and available literature, an emphasis on personal salvation, healing, deliverance from demons, the 'gospel of prosperity', offering material blessings to believers, charismatic worship in technologically sophisticated modern idiom- these are some of the constituents of this new wave of Christianity.<sup>13</sup>

His argument seems to clearly fit mainline churches' description of popular religious movements as 'foreign controlled religious movements: alleged to be Trojan horses of outside interests'.<sup>14</sup> In spite of the complications in the origin of these new



religious movements, one thing is evident: that these Churches are African-led and are expressing African solutions to African problems.

Research into the new religious movements should therefore seek answers to these new set of questions raised by Paul Gifford: In what way are these new churches a flowering of African Christianity? What attitude do these new Pentecostal Churches adopt towards African culture? What is the Western factor in this phenomenon? To what degree are Western missionaries involved? What roles do Western literature, technology, media play? To what degree is the theology of these new movements Western?<sup>15</sup>

### **Theology of the New Religious/Charismatic Movements**

The motivational force behind the mass migration from the historic mission churches or traditional African Initiated Churches to newer Pentecostal Churches rests with the kind of theology found in these movements. Theology in these movements is done in the context of social, economic and political concerns of the members. On the basis of theological emphasis, at the risk of oversimplification, popular religious movements may be grouped into two broad categories: firstly, those who in addition to the normal evangelical –Pentecostal message (Jesus Christ the Saviour, the Healer, the Baptizer in the Holy Spirit, and the soon coming King), place an overriding emphasis on abundant life or the material or physical well being of the believer, secondly, those which in addition to Pentecostal message, as outlined above, have an overriding concern for so-called deliverance. These churches are commonly referred to as “Deliverance Ministries”.<sup>16</sup> It is possible that one may find the two aspects in the same ministry with different degrees of emphasis; this description fits the Eternity Worship Centre. In the matter of faith and practice Eternity Worship Centre



emphasizes the believer's personal salvation, baptism by emersion and places strong emphasis on the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Eternity Worship Centre like many other newer Pentecostal groups is known for being rooted in ordinary people's concerns and therefore closer to social, community and material issues than the historic mission Churches. A respondent asserted that she became part of the Eternity Worship Centre because the pastor helped to transform her life. "I was a drunk and living a hopeless life, but Christ has changed me completely and now I am a useful wife and mother to my husband, children and even the society"<sup>17</sup> Another person testified that since he came to Eternity he had "an absolute freedom to worship the Lord". "I have freedom to speak in tongues, pray, shout, clap and dance to the glory of God". In my former church was under restriction to do all of these. Spiritual benefits have always been an important factor in an individual's choice of religion. Popular religion develops a new support mechanism in that it reinforces the new values and new self-understanding of its members. Even though the individual may appear powerless to confront the socio-political structures of the nation, with conversion he or she has been able to do something to take charge of his or her own private life, the narrower world of personal behaviour. This new status known as "social capital" makes a hopeless individual hopeful and converts him/her to be an asset in his society.<sup>18</sup>

Gifford in the same trend of thought argues that "In societies where politics is carried on by corrupt clienteles, a reform of culture through religion may well be the best option the populace has." In other word the values, norms and behaviour that have brought such improvement and advance in the personal domain, can then be brought to bear to restructure political society too.<sup>19</sup>

Besides, popular religion also serves as a community expression of a group desire to achieve a religious satisfaction that is not forthcoming from a mainstream religion. These movements normally appealed to combinations of motivations both religious and political. Most Africans regard themselves as religious people, believing in a God (or gods) who overlooks them and what they do. Many believe that religious worship is a means to improve their mundane position. In other words, it is actually rather difficult to tell when an individual's motivations are "religious or political".<sup>20</sup>

Schatzberg argues in a metaphorical statement that social dynamics in Africa are best viewed as a "triple-stranded helix of state, class, and ethnicity". Jeff Haynes supported this proposition but added religion instead of state to the triple-stranded helix metaphor in order to understanding the dynamic nature of popular religion in Africa. Each is present within an individual's world-view, and in certain situations, at certain times, one element will dominate. Sometimes religion serves to form the context for political action; that is, political concerns will be imbued with religious notions which will help to determine the nature of a group collective response.<sup>21</sup>

There is an awareness of how Christians may through prayer and right living, reverse conditions so that the deteriorating social, economic and political situations in the community can be turned around for good. In essence most members of the popular religions are of the opinion that what represses and keeps people in spiritual and economic degradation is nothing but satanic bondage which is also manifested as witchcraft and sorcery. Spiritual warfare is very real and taken most seriously among the members. They firmly believed that God has called them to bring the message of hope, of deliverance from poverty, sickness, ignorance, inferiority complex, and mental enslavement to the present generation.

Teachings and preaching at the Eternity Worship Centre focus on the realm of spiritual powers and it is seen as dealing with this important area of life in more honest and direct ways, helping people to cope with the struggle which defines and circumscribes day-to day life for so many people. Members of Eternity have been motivated to rely on the gifts of the Holy Spirit and to be constant in prayer. The more they pray the greater will be the power of God to work miracles and defeat the powers of darkness.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, the theology of the newer Pentecostal churches seeks to rebuild the bruised self-perception of the individual by empowering him with new hope and confidence. Members have been assisted to bring together the rich promises of the Gospel that would enable them to reclaim, redeem and liberate the land. Does the description above fit the ‘so called prosperity gospel’? The essential point of this Gospel of Prosperity is that prosperity of all kinds is the right of every Christian. God wants a Christian to be wealthy. True Christianity necessarily means wealth; it inevitably brings wealth. Conversely, poverty indicates personal sin, or at least a deficient faith or inadequate understanding. Paul Gifford notes that the prosperity gospel “is not taught by all these evangelists or at least with the same insistence, but it is becoming a fairly standard part of Africa’s revival.” He believes this gospel is a new and foreign element in Africa’s evangelical Christianity.<sup>23</sup>

There seems to a tremendous growth within these newer Pentecostal churches. But several important questions remain unanswered as scholars research this new religious phenomenon unfolding in Africa. How many of these members stay indefinitely in these newer Pentecostal Churches? How many move on to seek another new phenomenon? What kind of hope is promised to these members?



## END NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Titus Kivunzi, interview by the researcher, October 16, 2003. Nairobi, Tape recording and notes.

<sup>2</sup> David Marlombe, interview by the researcher, December 5, 2003. Nairobi, Tape recording and notes.

<sup>3</sup> Titus Kivunzi.

<sup>4</sup> David Marlombe.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen D. Morad, "A manuscript [of] the original work of Shelly Arensen, *The Spreading Tree: A History of the Africa Inland Church in Kenya 1895-1995*". 136-137.

<sup>6</sup> David Marlombe. The Reckoning team comprised mostly a band of young men who claimed to have caught the fire of the Pentecostalism in the city and returned to their villages. The group organized overnight prayers (vigils), home Bible studies, and prayer meetings. Most members of the team would attend the AIC on Sundays but associate with this team during the course of the week.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Allan H. Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the Twentieth Century* (Trenton, N.J: Africa World Press, 2001), 107-112.

<sup>9</sup> Aylward Shorter and Joseph N. Njiru, *New Religious Movements in Africa* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2001), 17.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>11</sup> Titus Kivunzi.

<sup>12</sup> Kevin Ward, "Africa" quoted in Adrian Hastings ed., *A World History of Christianity in Africa* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 234.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 234.

<sup>14</sup> Jeff Haynes, *Religion and Politics in Africa* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd., 1996), 7.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Gifford, *New Dimension in African Christianity* (Nairobi: All Conference of Churches, 1992), 1-3

<sup>16</sup> E. Kingsley Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity* (Accra Ghana: Centre for Pentecostal and Charismatic studies, 2001), 312.



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<sup>17</sup> Lucy Sauli, testimony, Eternity Worship Centre Fifth Anniversary, March 14, 2004. Nairobi.

<sup>18</sup> Mark Shaw, “Popular Religion” (Lecture notes HS 601 Church and State, Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology Second Term January –March 2003/2004). This statement was originally used by David Martin.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Gifford, “Some recent development in African Christianity”, *African Affairs*, Oct. 1994 v93 n373 p513 (22).

<sup>20</sup> Jeff Haynes, 138-139.

<sup>21</sup> M. Schaltzberg, “The Dialectics of Oppression in Zaire” quoted in Jeff Haynes, *Religion and Politics in Africa* (Nairobi: East Africa Educational Publishers Ltd, 1996), 140.

<sup>22</sup> Pastor Charles Kaloki, Teaching Adult Sunday school “Topic Spiritual Warfare” January 18, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Gifford, “Prosperity Gospel: A New and Foreign Element in African Christianity Religion” vol. 20, (1990), 375.

## CHAPTER 5

### **FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR ETERNITY WORSHIP CENTRE SECESSION FROM THE RHEMA FELLOWSHIP**

The secession of the Eternity Worship Centre from the Rhema Fellowship was triggered by a variety of factors. These factors include some elements of what triggered African independency in the past. But with Eternity Worship Centre been placed in the context of a new religious movement; the existing theory of African Independency must be amended or modified to fully explain the present religious phenomenon. The secession which led to the emergence of Eternity Worship Centre was a result of several factors such as: leadership crisis, doctrinal differences, misappropriation of funds etc. These factors are inadequate to fully explain the emergence of Eternity Worship Centre considering the social, political, economic and religious climate prevailing in Kenya in the last two decades.

For instance, Kenya in the decade of the 1980s was characterized by the culture of fear as a result of a persistent state of insecurity. Corruption, tribalism, nepotism, one party-state rule etc. became the order of the society. Hopes mustered in post independence Kenya were shattered and many Kenyans lived in the face of despondency. The place for safety was in the camps of these emerging new religious movements, since mainline and traditional African Independent Churches have become closed allied of the ruling elites. New religious movements provided an alternative society for the disillusioned Kenyans. Such an explanation may not fully hold true for the old traditional African Independency.

The explosion of Pentecostal missionaries on the landscape of Kenya also contributed immensely to the emergence of some of these neo-Pentecostal movements such as the Eternity Worship Centre. These Western Charismatic missionaries, most of who are from independent ministries in America chose to work with these new religious movements. For instance an African American Missionary Rev. Janis Simpkins from Pittsburgh Pennsylvania has been in partnership with the Eternity Worship Centre for the past three years. She has also connected Eternity Worship Centre with an Interdenominational ministry such as the Lydia Fellowship International in the USA.

Despite the phenomenal growth within the newer Pentecostal movements there is evidence of massive secessions. Commitments are solely based on a rational choice rooted in what could bring individual members rewards, happiness, satisfaction, participation and enthusiasm.<sup>1</sup> Secondly there is nothing unusual about Africans moving from one faith to another, dependent on where they perceive their best self-interest to being lie. Many for instance, moved from belief in traditional deities to either Islam or Christianity because the old gods had failed to protect them from invasion by Europeans. The appeal of American-style fundamentalist churches (neo-Pentecostal movements) should be seen in the same way. Apparent failure to engender and sustain these commitments could simply result in a birth of new cells which are constantly forming by the splitting of ongoing cells, cells overlapping and fluid cells.

Factors such as: leadership crises, doctrinal differences, misappropriation of funds etc. which were common within African Initiated Churches did not completely fade away with the passing of time. Research into the new religious movements has

shown how these factors have continued to trigger secessions. It is a glaring fact that secessions and continuous fragmentations are unabated within African Christianity.

The history of Eternity Worship Centre bore witness to some of these common factors. The first factor was leadership crisis. Leadership within the newer Pentecostal movements becomes dependent upon proved worth and charisma and not upon inherent right as was in the traditional African Independent Churches. Leaders are considered first among equals. This explanation gives a distinct characteristic and feature to the new religious movements. As soon as some detect a fault, a weakening of charisma or automatic exercise of power, a spilt occurs. Besides, with the principle of the priesthood of all believers, every convert is a potential recruiter. So, “building a new altar”, which is the metaphor for a spilt, or “receiving a new vision”, soon extends the boundaries.<sup>2</sup>

The quest for power coupled with selfishness have also caused further divisions and misunderstanding between leaders of the newer Pentecostal Churches. The arrogance, the sweet taste of power and prestige, the lack of patience and tolerance, the personality conflicts, the misuse of power are some of the monsters that have paraded the corridor of African Christianity for centuries. Should the Churches in Africa decide to unite to form a united front, they would become a formidable force for good of African Christianity.

According to a respondent, Pastor Kaloki has developed a “pleasant relationship” within the Rhema Fellowship that won the hearts of some members. It was further asserted that many members of the Church freely related to him rather than Bishop Richard Kimwele. A respondent commented on the scenario when he quoted the Bishop as saying “there was a plan under way to snatch away my church or overthrow me.”<sup>3</sup> A situation the Bishop termed as infringing or threatening his



territory which he resolved to resist. The thirst for power is the number one enemy of the African Church. Majola Agbedi complained when he said “it is one of the besetting sins of native organizations that every man desires to be the leader”.<sup>4</sup> But it is more dangerous if leaders of African Church would perceive other potential leaders as threat to their ‘dynasty or empire.’

A new and dynamic phenomenon is at work in many leaders of new religious movements. This variable is very subtle and difficult and may not be easily detected. It appears that many that defect from established African Initiated Churches or other new religious movements have had a strong passion to establish and be leaders of a church ministry themselves. This was very visible during the investigation about the Eternity Worship Centre. Consistent statements such as “I came to Rhema Fellowship to assist and not to stay” came from the founder of the Eternity Worship Centre who has been exposed to radical discipleship trainings on the University campus.<sup>5</sup> Another respondent in the crisis said we “had our vision for Karen many years before coming to Rhema.”<sup>6</sup> The consequence of such a multiple vision is the collisions or clashes in visions which have normally occur in many new religious movements.

Doctrinal controversy was the second major factor which triggered the secession from the Rhema Fellowship. The controversy was mainly focused on the teachings such as: deliverance, breaking of curses, and demon possession. It was said that the importance of the salvation of the soul became a matter of secondary issue at the Rhema Fellowship. The Church has prioritized the doctrine of deliverance, breaking of curses and demon possession.<sup>7</sup> At one point a crisis erupted because someone questioned the Bishop concerning scriptural basis for such teaching as well as the primary reason for the existence of the Church. The exact nature of such teaching was difficult to explain by some respondents though they claimed it has a

biblical basis. A respondent, in an attempt to clearly articulate this new teaching said that, “a member of the church has to go through a rigorous period of deliverance after salvation in order to become a full member of the Church”. It was further asserted that during this period of so-called deliverance exorcisms were the major concentration of the Church.<sup>8</sup>

Another teaching which follows closely to deliverance was the “breaking of curses” in the lives of the members. Members of the Church were made to dig into their past to find out whether they were once cursed by their parents, family or community. The curses were believed to be generational, tribal, family and must be broken for the believer to be set free. It is very obvious that people will shift their loyalty to a new movement when they realize the doubtful relevance and poor quality of a present movement.

The third factor which was recognized was poor management of church funds. This became one of the overriding factors responsible for secession within the Rhema Fellowship. It is obvious that no vision can survive in the mission without proper accountability. A respondent asserted that the funds collected within Rhema Fellowships were in the hands of the Bishop and his close allies. A proposal to set up a financial board to be in charge of the Church funds was received with stern resistance and thus generated further crises.<sup>9</sup> It is a common notion among some leaders of the new religious movement that the church is a place to change one’s economic status. In essence self-interest is paramount even for the leaders.

Ultimately, the sharp contrast between the lavish living of the pastors and the poverty of their audiences becomes a source of scandal. A recent feature article in a national newspaper in Kenya drew attention to several examples.<sup>10</sup> Pastor Wilfred Lai is a former bank clerk, who heads the Jesus Celebration Centre in Mombassa,

possesses a Ssang Yong Musso car, and lives in an expensive bungalow, complete with swimming pool, in the affluent Nyali Estate. Two years ago a Mombassa tycoon placed KShs. 3.6 million in Lai's Sunday's collection. The more one prays and gives financially to God, the more one will receive an earthly and later a heavenly reward.<sup>11</sup> It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the faith gospel formula is, to a great extent, a child of modern secular materialism emanating from the Americas, and that for some of its exponent religion is a way of making money. According to a respondent the mismanagement of funds in Rhema intensified when the Church enters in partnership with some independent churches or missions in the States. The situation became worse when the Bishop made several trips to the United States and supports became trickling to the Church.<sup>12</sup>

Factors such as leadership, doctrine, mismanagement of church funds which were relevant in the old traditional African Independency may no longer be adequate to fully explain the emergence of new religious phenomenon on the landscape of Africa. An explanation such as the anarchy in political, social, economic and religious spheres, which drew many common and middle class Kenyans to Church as the Eternity Worship Centre, had provided a new paradigm of explanation. One way many Africans responded to the difficult and perplexing circumstances associated with the effects of the harsh reality of life was to adopt religious beliefs which offered both instrumental and expressive benefits (such as health, fertility, prosperity, guidance etc.).

Another instance is that many of the rural-urban migrants in Africa who find themselves between two worlds, often without and effective or appropriate set of anchoring values. To this end such people best choice of Christianity will be within

the neo- Pentecostal movements, a place of shelter, psychological security, and solidarity.



## END NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human side of Religion* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 141.

<sup>2</sup> Ogbu U. Kalu, “The Third Response: Pentecostalism and the Reconstruction of Christian Experience in Africa”, 1970-1995 in *Journal of African Christian Thought*, Vol. 1 No.2 (December 1998):8

<sup>3</sup> Ann David, interview by researcher, September 14, 2003. Nairobi. Tape recording and notes.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Falk, *The Growth of the Church in Africa* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 492.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Kaloki, interview by researcher, Founder/Pastor Eternity Worship Centre. November 11, 2004, Nairobi. Tape Recording and notes. Pastor Kaloki remarks on several occasions during the interview that “I did not come to Rhema Fellowship to stay. The Lord has called me to lead but I did not heed his voice. Personally I kept myself at the back roll by giving support to many other church leaders. I think that was a training ground for me. Today the Lord has graduated me from being seated at the ‘back roll’ (follower) to take the ‘front’ (leadership)” Pastor Munyi, assistant Pastor of the Rhema Fellowship described the Founder of Eternity Worship Centre as “a man who wants be a leader and not to be led.” The investigation into the character of Pastor Kaloki for the last one and the half year point to the contrary. The Pastor has displayed to a large extent some characteristics of a servant leader that personally inspired many including the researcher.

<sup>6</sup> Miriam Mbevi, interview by the researcher, September 21, 2003. Nairobi. Tape Recording and notes.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Kaloki

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Lucy Kamini, interview by researcher. September 21, 2003. Tape recording and notes.

<sup>10</sup> Ombuor, Joe and Ikonya, Philo. “Clerics’ Lavish Living”, *Daily Nation*, (Friday, March 19: 1999, Weekender Magazine): 1-3.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 2-3

<sup>12</sup> Kaloki

## CHAPTER 6

### IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH AND MISSIONS

The bleak, uncompromising economic and political reality which unfolded in Africa in the decade of the 1980s, gave rise to a new phenomenon in African Christianity. This phenomenon has further reacted against situations such as: the failure of nation states which resulted in massive disillusionments evidenced by legitimacy crises, lapses and fragmentation in the traditional African Initiated Churches. Economic stagnation, fractured family, community, environmental degradation and international isolation were among the underlying factors that gave rise to these movements. Africans in the midst of these difficult circumstances opted for any religion that would bring them help and hope. The explosion of Neo-Pentecostal movements on the religious landscape of Africa its movements with distinctive theology of God meeting all the needs of human beings in the suffering and death of Christ, greatly appealed to many Africans living with poverty, sickness, injustices, corruption, war and conflict resulting from ethnicity. The teachings of these movements state that every Christian should now share the victory of Christ over sin, sickness and poverty. Besides, a believer has a right to the blessings of health and wealth won by Christ, and he can obtain these blessings merely by a positive confession of faith. In the wake of such teachings which give birth to many of these new religious movements, the traditional explanations of African independency may be rendered obsolete.

The analysis and investigation into primary dynamic factors which led to the emergence of the Eternity Worship Centre have unravelled the fact that in spite of the

presence of traditional factors of African Independency new dynamic factors are responsible for its emergence. One of the overriding factors was the new wave of Pentecostalism which presents the Faith Gospel. New religious movements are commonly known for being susceptible to the trend known as “Faith Gospel or Prosperity Gospel.” The origins of such teachings are mostly attributed to western preachers such as Kenneth Hagin, Oral Roberts, Morris Cerullo, Yonggi Cho, Kenneth Copeland, and Renihard Bonnke T. L. Osborn etc.<sup>1</sup> With the rise of these movements, different churches that subscribed to these teachings have displayed their own version of the gospel. Some do not openly refer to it as the ‘Prosperity Gospel’ but ‘Abundant life message.’ The Winners Chapel in Nairobi could be an example of one version of such a teaching. The movement is Nigerian in origin, and it makes extensive use of printed handbills, newsletters and audiotapes. It has an aggressive marketing policy. “A new day is about to dawn on the church!” proclaims the handbill, “The church will enter the realm of inexplicable wealth... you’re in a commission that makes rich, therefore you can not be poor.”<sup>2</sup> Mensa Otabil of Global Revival Ministries who referred to this teaching as an abundant life message felt such teaching was essential to make African churches self-governing, self-propagating, self-financing, and self-theologizing.<sup>3</sup>

It is therefore true to admit the fact that success in these movements is deemed to be the result of the ministry of the “anointed Christian”.<sup>4</sup> The anointed Christian is primarily the minister or pastor who gives his congregation “a total religious experience”. It must also be conceded that, in the prosperity Gospel, success also comes through self-respect, self-confidence, imagination, ambition, planning, determination, application, courage, discipline and sacrifice.<sup>5</sup> The investigation into the character of the leader of the Eternity Worship Centre brought to the surface some



of these characteristics. The leader's inspiration led the young Church (membership less than 100) without any foreign assistance to purchase a piece of property in Karen Brooks for three and half million Kenyan shillings.

In spite of the confidence with which the faith gospel message is proclaimed, and in spite of the undeniable opulence of the evangelists who proclaim the doctrine, adherence to such emerging religious movements, is far from being a formula for automatic enrichment for ordinary Christians. Such a gospel obviously holds an attraction for the poor classes, but evidence has shown that people are quickly disillusioned, especially when continued failure to acquire wealth is ascribed to personal sin or lack of faith. It is obvious that people will shift their loyalty to a new movement because of the poor quality and doubtful relevance of their present movement. In the wake of such continual disillusionments being experienced both within the Church and in the society in contemporary Africa in the decade of the 1980s, it is most likely that many African Christians will migrate to other newer religious movements in the near future. In other words popular religion will probably last as long as it delivers what it claims to offer; namely enhanced spiritual help to those who feel they need it.

The Church in Africa therefore, is under obligation to present an authentic gospel that rests on faith and history which results in a sure Christian foundation. In other words, in the confusing welter of movements, miracles services, crusades and healing ministries, there is need for the witness of authority and the historic tradition that goes back to Jesus himself the long anticipated Messiah. There is need for authoritative teaching and governance. Christians must testify strongly to the faith once delivered unto us by the Lord Jesus Christ through his Apostles.



At this point history plays a major role in the African Church. In the 1920s and 30s, the African Independent Churches rose with the aim of bringing authentic African Christianity which would result in liberation or hope to the Africans suffering prior to independence. The promised liberation or hope was short lived after the independence. Most African leaders resorted to the big man model, corruptions (in sacred and temporal powers), nepotism, dictatorships, wars, coup d'état etc. which had triggered schisms, fragmentations and massive disillusionments. Some Independent churches were even strong advocates of corrupt African governments. The Church was “sleeping in bed with temporal powers” and had failed to maintain a critical distance. Africans therefore, had no alternative but to seek another religion because of the failures of both the Church and government to live up to the hope and promises prior to the independence. The failures especially within the African Independent Churches, which were the hope and redemption of many Africans, directly resulted in the rise of new religious movements that bore some characteristics of the African Independent Churches but have North American origins, urban based features and theology which emphasized over realized eschatology. It is an obvious fact that some of them are gradually falling to the same pitfalls of promising false hope to many Africans.

Having said this we are careful to note that there are many lessons we can learn from the new religious movements in Africa. Jeff Haynes has also captured some of the positive contributions of the new religious movement in his book *Politics and Religions in Africa*:

“The contemporary growth of popular religious organizations in Africa thus not only reflects a widespread disaffection with mainstream religious organizations; it has also meant that the spiritual and material lives of increasing numbers of ordinary people have been enhanced.”<sup>6</sup>

What does the success of new religious movements bode for the future of Christianity in Africa? These movements are proliferating with incredible rapidity. This research has attempted to point out their origins, doctrines and practices and contributions by investigating, the emergence of the Eternity Worship Centre.

The first lesson we can learn from the new religious movement is that the unprecedented growth of the Church south of the Sahara is taking place among the new religious movements.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, their faith and worship do not rest on the abstract or the cerebral, too remote from the daily lives of their members as mostly seen within the mainline churches. They are problem solving, evidenced by addressing a whole catalogue of personal and social issues that have been neglected by the mainline churches. New religious movements attempt to respond to socio-economic realities. The needs and aspirations of people to which the new religious movements provide an answer stem from the socio-economic condition of the time and location.

But in order for this movement to succeed, preachers of the movement must render the situation intelligible to their followers. Their teaching must skilfully explain apparently disordered events as coherent and logical. For instance the decade of 90s in Liberia witnessed the declined of the national economy as a result of civil war and thus many Liberians experienced poverty, unemployment and stress. This affects education, housing, food, living conditions. To make matters worse, a minority in the country were entering upon the affluent life-style of a consumer society. The poor and the desperate yearned for this unattainable “good life”. The complexity and confusion confronting people in their daily life experiences compelled them to look for solutions of ultimate meaning.

New religious movements cater especially for the more frustrated and disadvantaged sections of the population. The leaders act as scriptural interpreters, offering hope to those especially in the urban areas who are disaffected by what independence and modernization have brought. In other words these movements function as healers to people suffering despair, disillusionment and pessimism.

Another lesson we can learn from the new religious movement that was so practical in our investigation of the Eternity Worship Centre was the attraction of young people. Young people seek education or employment in a state of social and psychological alienation. Mostly they are not rich or well connected. But new religious movements can raise disorientated youth to a different social level, transforming their social relationships and affirming them as individuals. They can relate to one another as people who are accepted, respected and supported. Adults treat them as equals. The movement gives them a new family, as it were. In the new religious movements they often find the affirmation denied by family and society. For many this is “the first tangible revelation of God’s love”.

This research was restricted to the analysis and critiques of the traditional explanations of Africa independency in the context of the Eternity of the Eternity Worship Centre. It has attempted to put forth a new explanation of African independency that in the wake of massive social, political, religious, and economic upheavals in the decade of the 1980s a new wave of religious phenomenon arose to provide some form of answers to many Africans. The origin, nature of theology, rapid growth, attitudes towards African culture continues to be a matter of further research. We may have a diverse and even contradictory witnesses to the Kingdom of God in Africa by some of these new religious movements; some of their action may be

revolting or inspiring but they all form part of the history of the Church in Africa. Let us therefore be mindful to know that we are doing history in order to make history.



**END NOTES**

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<sup>1</sup> Aylward Shorter and Joseph N. Njiru. *New Religious Movements in Africa* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2001), 31-32.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 32-33.

<sup>3</sup> E. Kingsley Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity* (Accra-Ghana: Centre for Pentecostal and Charismatic studies, 2001), 307-308.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Gifford, "Gospel for Champions", *The Tablet*, (September 18, 1999), 1256-1257.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 1256.

<sup>6</sup> Jeff Haynes. *Politics and Religion in Africa* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd. 1996), 82.

<sup>7</sup> Jenkins Philip, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1-3

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### **Oral Interviews**

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- Kimani Lucy, Church administrator and founding member Eternity Worship Centre.
- Kivunzi, Titus, Former Bishop Africa Inland Church and Professor NEGST
- Marlombe, David, Evangelist and founding member Eternity Worship Centre
- Mbai, Miriam, founding member Eternity Worship Centre
- Muyele, Leonard, former Pastor Eternity Centre, seceded to form the Rehoboth Ministry.
- Munyi, Nicholas, Pastor Rhema Fellowship, seceded to form the Living Water Church.
- N'ganga, Josephine, member Rhema Fellowship, later became member Rehoboth Ministry
- Sauli. Lucy founding member Eternity Worship Centre
- Waniah, Leah founding member Eternity Worship Centre