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To cite this article: Akoko Robert Mbe (2007) 'You Must Be Born-Again': The Pentecostalisation of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 25:2, 299-315, DOI: [10.1080/02589000701396306](https://doi.org/10.1080/02589000701396306)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589000701396306>



Published online: 09 Nov 2007.



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## **‘You Must Be Born-Again’: The Pentecostalisation of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon**

*Akoko Robert Mbe*

Pentecostalism, whose origin is traced from the ‘great awakening’ (the so-called Holiness Movement) in the United States in the early twentieth century, was marginally present in Africa by the middle of the century and over the last two decades has grown phenomenally there. Though it is difficult to come out with exact figures, it has tens of millions of followers across the continent and has continued to grow at an astonishing rate. Its ritual practice of dealing with evil and misfortune has been a hallmark of the movement because this directly relates to the widely-shared concerns of the African public (Corten and Marshall 2001; Gifford 1992, 1994, 1998; Marshall 1992; Van Dijk 2000). However, as I have argued elsewhere (Akoko 2002), the economic crisis affecting most African countries has also contributed enormously to the spread of the movement. The structural adjustment programmes imposed by Breton Wood institutions as a way to revamp these economies has ushered in hardship for citizens and pushed many of them towards pentecostalism.

My research in Cameroon shows that a whole range of economic opportunities that have been opened up by pentecostal groups during this period of structural adjustment has drawn many people into the movement.<sup>1</sup> These pentecostal churches need pastors and other workers. Many unemployed people have enrolled in Pentecostal Bible Colleges not because of the pastoral call to serve but to earn a living. Some of the churches have enormous projects and establishments such as schools, hospitals and banks. Employment opportunities are offered only to members of the church, and many people have joined for the sake of a job. Meanwhile, the relaxation in 1990 of laws concerning associational group has enhanced the growth of pentecostalism.

Before 1990 the Cameroonian government, for political reasons, had made the registration of associations, including religious groups, very difficult. Numerous legal measures had been put in place to discourage the formation of associations, particularly those that could be construed as being critical of the regime. These measures, which were instituted by the first president, Ahmadou Ahidjo, in 1962,

fell under the anti-subversion decree (Law No. 62/OF/18 of March 12, 1962), and were continued by his successor, Biya Paul, until 1990, when they were repealed through a series of laws known as the liberty law (No. 90/052 of December 19, 1990). Taking advantage of the change, new pentecostal churches started coming into the country and indigenous ones were also being founded.

Though several kinds of pentecostal group continue to multiply throughout the continent, what unites them is their maintenance of the doctrinal tenets of early pentecostalism, which include the biblical emphasis on salvation and justification by faith, the doctrine of the second coming of Christ, the stress on spiritual healing, and the doctrine of the baptism by the Holy Ghost, symbolised by speaking in tongues (glossolalia) and expressed in the story of pentecost in the Acts of the apostles, "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). Each group speaks of a rebirth in Christ (born again) and signifies a radical conversion in the form of a 'genuinely' biblical baptism by immersion of the new faithful as a final stage of membership (Nichol 1966; Hollenweger 1972).

Spiritual revival occupies a central position in each of the groups and for this reason, they warn all Christians against spiritual dangers which could undermine the Christian faith. Indeed, they are so persuasive that they are now drawing membership away from the mainline Churches. Some mainline practices are being replaced by these pentecostal practices though there are some traditional practices which they insist must not be altered, for instance, the PCC authorities do not tolerate the pentecostal practice of baptism by immersion.

This article examines the gradual process of pentecostalisation which is taking place in the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC), and particularly why believers want to imitate pentecostalism and why the church authorities opened up to pentecostal practices. The PCC is of particular interest because this development is coming from below and the authorities of the church, who had initially resisted it, are gradually giving in to the wish of the ordinary members. Two earlier attempts were made by some of the leading figures of the church to introduce pentecostal practices in the church but each met with strong resistance from its authorities. Both cases ended up in the formation of a new pentecostal church, with the bulk of adherents being PCC converts.

Pentecostalisation of other mainline churches in Africa has been recorded – for instance, the Methodist and Roman Catholic Churches in Ghana. Revival in the Roman Catholic Church began in 1971 when a Holy Spirit sister started a prayer group in Koforidua after returning from the US. Another group was established in Accra in the same year, and a year later two medical missionary sisters, also from the US began the movement in Kumasi, which became something of a centre for charismatic renewal. Today many Catholic parishes in Ghana have prayer groups where healing is an important element, as indeed it is in many other churches in Ghana (Ter Haar 1994). In another study conducted in Ghana, Opoky (undated) argues that Africans strongly believe in witchcraft, demons, ancestral

curses or diseases and so, when afflicted by any of these, they look for spiritual healing. He argues that every Church finds it worthwhile to include spiritual healing in its programme since failure to do so amounts to losing members to Churches that include such activities, hence the continual pentecostalisation of Christianity in Africa.

While some mainline Churches allow the change others do not, and whenever a congregant or priest tries to introduce pentecostal practices he runs into problems with the authorities of the Church. For instance, in the Buea diocese of the Roman Catholic Church, one of its priests started a revival movement in his parish, which attracted many followers. When the bishop realised that the movement, inspired by the expansion of pentecostalism in the region, had adopted several pentecostal practices, he banned it. This not only brought serious tension between the group and the bishop but also resurrected an allochthony–autochthony conflict in the region because the south-westerners felt that the bishop (from north-west province) had reacted that way because the founder of the group was from south-west province.<sup>2</sup> This exemplifies a situation wherein the Church authorities successfully suppressed a move to pentecostalise a church. In some cases it ends up either in some members defecting to pentecostal groups where they believe they could have this spiritual fulfilment or a new pentecostal church, led by the leader of the group, is founded in which they continue their activities. For instance, The Lord (Pentecostal) Church–Agbelengor of Ghana seceded from the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) when its founder, Samuel Amedzro, started a prayer group, which adopted pentecostal elements within the EPC against the wish of the Church authorities. Its leaders were excommunicated because they resisted. The leaders of the group reacted by founding the New Lord (Pentecost) church (Meyer 1995).

The PCC, with headquarters in Buea, is the historical and constitutional successor to the original Basel Mission Church in Cameroon, established in 1886 as an external arm of the Evangelical Missionary Society of the Basel Mission in Switzerland (PCC Constitution). The church's antecedents go back to 1843, when the English Baptist Missionary Society started work in the Republic of Equatorial Guinea. Under Alfred Saker, the work expanded to Douala in 1845 and to Limbe in 1858. From then on, the mission expanded its activities to other coastal regions until 1887, when German missionaries took over following the German colonisation of Cameroon. The First World War disrupted the work after the defeat of the Germans. All German missionaries were expelled from Cameroon. The Basel Mission offered its field under French administration to another mission based in Paris and in 1925 it returned to British Cameroon with mostly Swiss missionaries. In 1957 their spiritual community became independent and acquired the name Presbyterian Church in Cameroon. It had a membership of between 600 000 and 800 000 or more in 2005 (Nyansako-Ni-Nku 1990; Dah 2003; PCC Church Diary 2006).

### **Earlier Controversial Attempts at Introducing Pentecostal Practices in the PCC**

Before looking at the current pentecostal practices infiltrating the PCC, it is important to review the earlier attempts to introduce these practices, which were resisted by the Church authorities. There were two remarkable efforts which led, after strong resistance from the authorities, to each of the leaders, including his followers, leaving the church to form a new one. Data on these earlier attempts were collected through interviews with some of the leading actors and eye-witnesses and from documented sources in the PCC archive in Buea. These earlier events not only reveal that the development is not new to the PCC, but also suggest that the Church authorities learnt from them in handling the present situation.

The first attempt dates back to 1976, when Zacharias Fomum introduced his movement, popularly called 'born-again', inside the Djoungolo congregation of the English-speaking parish of the Eglise Presbyterienne camerounaise, which today is the Bastos congregation of the PCC. Fomum, a university lecturer and the son of a late PCC minister, started the movement at a time when he was a church elder of the congregation. He was a charismatic lay preacher whose message stressed the need to become 'born-again' for a personal salvation through on-the-spot rebirth or reception of Jesus Christ. Everybody who felt guilty and decided to repent was expected to declare their feelings in public, either in the church or at rallies organised by him.

As years passed Fomum's popularity extended to members of other denominations who attended his rallies. Many people hailed Fomum as they came forward every Sunday in the church and crusades to declare that they had repented or 'given their lives' to Jesus. Others in the congregation grumbled every time the born-again Christians interrupted the service to testify how Jesus saves and heals. When these 'repented' members met those who had not, they presented themselves as 'born-again', or the saved ones, and spoke eloquently and boastfully that they had received Jesus Christ in their lives and that all other people were 'sinners'.

The congregation got to breaking point because of this split. Fomum's movement extended to other PCC congregations and he and his followers could be seen preaching and organising crusades in these other churches and persuading people to join. I lived in Yaounde for three months in 1980 with a relative who was part of the movement and during this period I attended some of their activities partly to please my host, whose desire was to convert me, and for curiosity's sake. I saw how, after official duty hours, the evangelists spent most of their time on the group's activities (of revival meetings, crusades, all-night prayers and so on) and when any of them did not succeed in persuading a relative to join them, they preferred to part with the person.

After watching Fomum's crusade with keen interest for a long time, the synod felt that it was splitting the Church rather than uniting it. It also felt suspicious that Fomum could have been using the PCC to build a large following in order to found his own Church, because he had started rebaptising Presbyterian Christians by immersion, telling them that the PCC baptism practice of sprinkling water on the head of Christians could not save them. The Church authorities finally prohibited Fomum's activities in the PCC. He and many of his followers thereupon pulled out of the PCC to join other pentecostal Churches. He himself joined the Full Gospel Mission but later left to found the Christian Missionary Fellowship International.

The Reverend Dr Bame Michael led the second major move in the pentecostalisation of the PCC from the late Eighties to the Nineties. Unlike the Fomum crusade, called 'born-again', Bame's was known as the 'revival' movement because Bame believed that 'revival' was lacking in the PCC and needed to be introduced. He had been appointed parish pastor of Djoungolo in 1979, at a time when the Fomum's 'born-again' movement was still fresh in the minds of the congregation. When he took over, he had the Herculean task of rebuilding faith in members of a congregation that had been given the impression that there was something wrong with the traditional practices of the church and also putting an end to further defection to pentecostal Churches. In several sermons he preached against Fomum and the 'dangers' of his movement. In one such sermon, which I heard in September 1981, he pointed out that he and Fomum were fellow students in the Cameroon Protestant College, Bali, in the early Sixties and that the Fomum he knew then was no different from the one he knew at the time of the sermon. This implied that Fomum's claim of being a born-again Christian or a changed person could not be justified.

Bame is credited with instilling strict discipline in the church. Over the years, his congregation became used to a formal and dignified order of worship which no other PCC church could rival. He was a gifted preacher and had the Bible at his fingertips, which enhanced his work as a profound pastor and scholar. His sermons were very deep and uplifting, and his lifestyle attested to his vocation (Buma Kor 1997). He also used his sermons to challenge the lifestyle of some members of the congregation, particularly those involved in corrupt practices and mystical groups such as the Rosicrucian order.

It was in the early Nineties that Bame started his revival movement, which later came to be called the Pilot Revival Prayer Group. It soon spread to other Anglophone PCC congregations, where it attracted a substantial number of followers. Gradually the Church authorities became more and more wary of the movement's teaching and liturgical practices, which appeared dangerously close to pentecostalism (Buma Kor 1997; Konings 2003; Mongwa 1995).

Bame's 'revival' doctrine called for every Christian to experience baptism of the Holy Spirit as a necessary step towards spiritual growth. This implied that the baptism by sprinkling of water on the head, as practised by the PCC, was a rite

that could symbolise but not generate the spiritual growth that would happen only when the second, true, baptism by the Holy Spirit took place. This revival movement was characterised by some practices that are clearly different from those of the PCC, most of them pentecostal-like. For instance, there was spiritual possession and healing, exorcism, the practice of glossolalia and loud prayers said at the same time by all members, giving testimonies in church, singing, clapping and dancing many choruses in church, and saying "Praise the Lord", "Amen", and "Halleluiah", after every chorus or during prayers. Buma Kor (1997) says that what attracted people was the movement's claim to offer spiritually uplifting prayers. The prayers and worship were said to be effective, liberating, personal and deeply spiritual while the PCC services were dry, methodical, uninspiring and not salvationist enough for their taste. Bame's approach promised healing, liberation from demon possession and evil attacks and assurance of salvation, which are considered rare parts of Presbyterian worship.

Bame was replaced in August 1990 by the Reverend Elangwe Isaac, but Bame's famous style still greatly influenced the congregation. Moreover, as a PCC clergyman, he could assist the new pastor in leading the worship or performing other Church rituals. He used these to continue building his movement.

The continued revivalism after Elangwe took over elicited differences between the two pastors because Elangwe was not part of it. The congregation thus had two pastors with conflicting approaches, and this led to a split between those who supported Bame and others who supported Elangwe.

The split was a reflection of similar divisions within the Cameroonian public and between communities and regions. Ethnicity and tribalism are so deeply embedded in Cameroonian society that people tend to support political parties and other structures for what gains their ethnic group, community or region can derive from them, regardless of what effects this might have on other groups or the nation in general. Nyamnjoh (2005) demonstrates that ethnicity and tribalism deepened in Cameroon when the democratisation process intensified after 1990 and an outcome of this is that the press now has also tended to reflect ethnic division. Tribal or ethnic newspapers, which propagate particular viewpoints are commonplace. For instance, the *Weekly Post* has committed itself to defending the interest of south-westerners against the north-westerners, *The Herald* and *The Post* that of the Anglophones, and *Le Messenger* the Bamilekes and *Le Patriote* that of the Beti ethnic group. With the opening up of multiparty politics, some newspapers have also been created to defend the interest of certain political parties – for instance, *Socialist Chronicle* for the Social Democratic Front and *Le Partriote* and *Cameroon Tribune* for the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement. This state of affairs seems to have received the blessing of the state in January 1996, with the adoption of a new Constitution that promised protection for minorities, the preservation of the rights of indigenous populations, and the requirement that chairpersons of regional councils be indigenes (Nyamnjoh 2005).

In the case of the Bastos congregation, the split was between north-westerners and south-westerners (a reflection of the south-west–north-west divide in Cameroon).<sup>3</sup> Indigenes of the south-west province felt that the revival movement intensified by Bame (a north-west indigene) was designed to rob Elangwe (a south-west indigene) of his right to lead one of the most prestigious PCC congregations. Consequently, they were inclined to be in Elangwe's camp against Bame, and the south-west elders joined Elangwe in being the most vocal opponents of Bame (Konings 2003; Masock 1998).

When the Church authorities, who had been following these developments with concern, realised that the differences were getting worse, they intervened by calling a number of meetings which failed to reach a compromise, and the movement was banned in the PCC in April 1997. Bame resigned from the PCC to join the Mission of the Evangelical Church in Cameroon in 1999 after which he founded its English-speaking parish, which he named church of Patmos. Most of its members belonged to his revival movement ([www.patmos.8m.net](http://www.patmos.8m.net)).

I interviewed some of those who took part in the Bastos crisis. One of them was the Reverend Dr Moyo Joshua, a lecturer at the PCC Theological Seminary in Kumba. He was already an ordained minister of the PCC at the time and doing postgraduate studies in the Faculty of Protestant Theology in Yaounde. As an ordained pastor, he assisted in the Bastos church. He was very active in the revival movement in its early stage because he believed that revival was integral to Christianity, but he later withdrew. He disclosed that when Bame conceived the idea, he called all the officials of the congregation, including other ordained pastors who were members of the congregation, to discuss it and they were all persuaded because they knew the importance of revival in a church.

Moyo gave three reasons for his own withdrawal. The first was that the initiative did not go through the right channels. Since it involved the Church, it needed official endorsement. Unfortunately the whole idea was conceived by Bame alone who tried to impose it on the congregation without sanction. When the hierarchy realised this and tried to call him for discussion, it sparked fire and degenerated into personality conflicts between himself and the Church authorities.

The second reason was that, as time went on, Bame started introducing other elements which Moyo disagreed with – for instance, the use of 'holy water' during revival services. He even questioned Bame on the importance of the water in a PCC congregation and why it could be administered only on revival members if it were that important, but he was unable to get a convincing response. This dampened his faith in the whole idea. Bame's mode of dress (barefooted, with a long white gown, which was not PCC tradition) during revival meetings on Sunday afternoons also made Moyo question why Bame put on PCC vestments for the normal morning service and this different attire for the revival service in the same sanctuary.



The third reason was that all those who claimed, at certain points, to have been possessed by the Holy Spirit during revival services were women, and the same group of women each time. As he argued, when the Holy Spirit descended on the early disciples on the day of pentecost, it did not do so only on women. Though he withdrew from the movement, Moyo acknowledges that the revival movement introduced by Bame did intensify prayer and Bible study in the congregation, which had never happened before.

The Reverend Dr Elangwe, the Dean of the PCC Theological Seminary at Kumba, was another person involved. Like Moyo, Elangwe said he was not against revival because, as a Church develops, it reforms itself (both in doctrines and practices) and revival is one of these aspects of reformation. This aspect deepens the spiritual life of the Christian as Bible reading is intensified. But a great problem in the Bastos revival was its tendency to be divisive. When he took over the congregation from Bame they worked closely until Bame introduced the movement, and Elangwe could not agree with certain forms of the worship. He and Bame never sat together to discuss the revival because Bame was so set on his ideas. They only met to talk about it in church session meetings and also in meetings called by the church authorities to resolve the problem.

I also talked to the Reverend Dr Bame, pastor of the church of Patmos and Dean of the Faculty of Evangelical Theology at Yaounde. Accused of pentecostalising the Church without permission, he argued that this was based on prejudices and misunderstandings. Bame insists that he told the former moderator that what he was doing was in the interest of the Church. He also states that in a document, which he edited, the present moderator said clearly that what Bame was teaching was in line with the Bible but it was not PCC practice. Bame replied that Christians need to experience God and the healing power of the Holy Spirit in their lives, and that he did not need permission to start praying for people who were suffering because it was part of his pastoral ministry to do so. He argued that the moderator opposing him for what he was doing was like accusing him of a spiritual crime that he had not committed because pentecostalism was an essential component of the Christian faith. He said he was ready to pay a price for it; and in fact he went for more than a year without a salary because the Church authorities decided to suspend payment. He blamed them for refusing to let him explain himself to the synod committee, which he believed would have handled the issue reasonably. As the son of a clergyman who had served the PCC for over 40 years, it was hard for him to quit the Church but he had to because he could not continue imprisoning his conscience.

This pentecostalising of a mainline church in Cameroon has not affected only the PCC. The Roman Catholic Church had a similar experience in its Bonjongo parish of the Buea Diocese in the second half of the 1990s (Konings 2003). This revival movement in the Catholic Church, popularly known as the Maranatha, was founded by Father Etienne Khumbah, the then parish priest of Bonjongo and simultaneously principal of Saint Paul's Higher Technical and Commercial College. Like

the pilot revival movement in Bastos, the Maranatha degenerated into the north-west–south-west disagreement because Bishop Pius Awah of the Buea diocese, who stood against it because of its pentecostal tendencies which he believed were not in compliance with Roman Catholicism, was an indigene of the north-west province while Khumbah was an indigene of the south-west. In an attempt at putting an end to the movement, the bishop transferred Khumbah to Bishop Rogan College (the minor seminary in Buea) as a teacher and suspended the movement, but Khumbah did not comply. After fruitless urging by other priests of the diocese for him to obey, he was placed under canonical interdict.<sup>4</sup> This sanction by the bishop was interpreted by Khumbah's supporters (mostly south-westerners) as being tribally motivated. They wrote protest letters to the political administration and the pope against the bishop, but the bishop succeeded in suppressing the movement and peace was restored in his diocese.

One point that can be underscored is that the pentecostalising of mainline Churches intensified in the 1990s. It was a time when Cameroonians were clamouring for a multiparty system of governance and other genuine democratic reforms after dictatorial rule since 1966. This urge for change was not unconnected with the 'wind of change' blowing through Africa then, which was stirred by the Soviet Union's *perestroika* and *glasnost* that crumbled the USSR and brought an end to the Cold War. Taking their cue from other African countries, Cameroonians responded to the fall of dictators and one-party regimes by holding early presidential, legislative and local council elections, sovereign national conferences, national debates and consultations, strike actions and mass non-violent disobedience (Ngoh 2004). It could be argued that a significant number of Christians of the two mainline Churches in Anglophone Cameroon – the Presbyterian and the Roman Catholic – took their cue from this call for change in the political system to reject the dogmatic practices of their various churches and try to introduce pentecostal ones. The two processes – democratisation and pentecostalisation – overlapped and were clearly linked. Within the Cameroon Baptist Convention too, there was a serious crisis that threatened to divide the Church in the same period. This did not involve the introduction of pentecostal practices but complaints of mismanagement. The leaders were accused of being materialistic, rather than paying attention to the spiritual needs of the believers, rigging elections in favour of their supporters, consulting witchdoctors to remain in power, and of being dishonest and corrupt (Aseh 2000). Like the democratic struggles confronting political leaders, some of the struggles for reform in the various Churches faced stiff resistance from those authorities.

### **The Ongoing Pentecostal Practices in the Church**

Being a Church with many congregations, a range of socio-geographical settings, and pastors of various professional levels, the form of pentecostalisation of the PCC varies a good deal. However, there are some practices which seem to cut across all PCC churches (both in urban and rural settings where some disparity

could be seen) that I have visited. This article uses the large, urban Molyko congregation to show how pentecostalisation practices take place at the micro-level. While they are not found everywhere, they can provide some general insight.

Data on this development in the congregation were collected mainly through participant observation and interviews. I am a practising Presbyterian and I have been a member of this congregation for over 13 years. Over this time, I have had a keen interest in observing the pentecostalisation process that has been going on in the Church. In 2003, I decided to make a formal study of this phenomenon in the PCC and because of this, interviews and secondary data were adopted as other methods of gathering data. Fetterman (1989) argues that in ethnographic research, a familiar setting can be too familiar and the researcher takes events for granted. In my own case I tried to minimise this as much as possible by being aware of that charge and by recollecting for correction, data that I had taken for granted over a long time. As one who is so close to many officials of the Church, including the pastor, I sometimes persuaded them to allow me to take part in certain meetings where I knew I could collect information on the pentecostalisation issue. On several occasions, I interviewed the pastor, elders and some members of the congregation on this development. Although a practising Presbyterian, I made sure this did not impact on my ability to collect and analyse the data from an anthropological perspective to avoid bias to either Presbyterianism or pentecostalism. If I had made a similar study before my training in anthropology (earlier than 1985), the tendency would have been to express some sympathy with Presbyterianism because mainline Church leaders discouraged their members from joining the 'born-again' movement. That partly accounts for why I could not be converted despite persuasion from my 1980 host in Yaounde. My anthropological training provided me with the methodological and theoretical tools to examine social processes. I was especially aware of my potential bias in favour of mainline Presbyterianism and was careful to counteract this by concentrating on good anthropological practice.

The Molyko register for 2003 shows that this congregation has about 1500 regular members, making it one of the biggest in the PCC. Because of its closeness to the PCC head office, some of its members are PCC staff.

Molyko is a neighbourhood in Buea town. Within the last 10 years, it has experienced an exponential growth in population because a university was created there in 1993. The area, which had had just four churches (Presbyterian, Baptist, Roman Catholic, and one pentecostal church, the Full Gospel Mission) when the university started, now has more than 20 pentecostal groups, most of them from Nigeria (Buea University Anthropology Students' Survey 2003).

The Molyko Presbyterians have gradually been pentecostalising. Unlike what happened with the Yaounde PCC congregation and the Maranatha of Buea Catholic diocese, there is no resistance from the PCC authorities because it is causing no significant division in the Molyko church. The process seems to be championed by its Christian Youth Fellowship (CYF) group, which has embraced many

pentecostal doctrines and practices; they then perform them in church to a wholeheartedly accepting congregation. The practices, include singing and dancing. Outside church services, there is also house-to-house evangelism, giving of testimonies, and spiritual healing. The discussion that follows highlights how each of these is put into practice.

The PCC uses an authorised hymnbook, *The Church Hymnary*, which is found in many Presbyterian churches throughout the world, and those of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland. In Cameroon, the hymns were translated into Mungaka and Duala (the two local languages spoken by early Basel missionaries) for use in the rural areas. Being rather classical, they are not sung accompanied by dancing and clapping. But the Sunday worship service could also have individual choral groups substituting some other music.

In Molyko, although the PCC liturgy prescribes about six hymns in a regular worship service, most often only about two are sung. Most congregations prefer pentecostal choruses, generally led by the CYF group in the Molyko case, and everyone joyfully joins in, giving themselves up to God. The dancing and clapping typical of pentecostal music usually accompany the singing and local instruments are used. Various individuals show their dancing styles as they rise and move forward to give their offering to God. Sometimes the minister has to stop the singing in order to continue with the liturgy. Some congregations sing more hymns and dance less, but the pentecostal style is everywhere.

The songs and dancing have also spread beyond the church. In most of the homes I have visited, and in cars and offices, people play pentecostal music. Where they cannot afford a music player, they tune in to the Revival Gospel radio station in Molyko. On various occasions such as deaths, births and marriages, I noticed that organisers chose this type of music. Indeed an event that brings members of the church together is likely to fail if pentecostal music is not played for people to dance to.

The Molyko PCC has adopted house-to-house evangelism and giving of testimonies, both strongly associated with pentecostalism although it needs more volunteers. This was a strategy to retrieve the backsliders and also to convert more people, because Molyko has become a competitive ground for religious activities. Testimonies and the arrangements for house-to-house evangelism take place during the mid-week prayer meeting. There the coordinator (either the pastor or a church elder) allocates a time for members to testify about how God helped them. The testimonies identify social problems, always to show that God is real and prevails over all evils. This evidence that a supernatural reality intervenes in the natural world is seen as miracles to strengthen faith in a God that is beyond our understanding. The testimonies may also be designed to deepen the understanding of the truths already taught and prod members to stay true to them, especially in times of complacency and negligence.

Another pentecostal practice in the PCC is spiritual healing. The testimonies include those from people who have been healed. Other PCC congregations, too, have been carrying out spiritual healing, as it has become a practice for pastors to visit their sick members. Interviews I conducted with 11 members of other congregations confirmed that this practice has spread in the PCC, perhaps because medical care has become unaffordable for ordinary Cameroonians as a result of the economic crisis. Rather than defecting, Molyko congregation members have preferred to sanction the practice in their own church.

### *Factors Contributing to Pentecostalism in Molyko*

Pentecostalism in Cameroon is highly influenced by the scenario in Nigeria. Most of the pentecostal churches are either branches of those already operating in Nigeria or were founded by Nigerians living in Cameroon or by Cameroonians who had lived and were converted in Nigeria (Akoko 2002; Gifford 1998). The gospel music which Cameroonians enjoy consists mainly of pentecostal songs from Nigeria. The lyrics are in English but the rhythm is pleasant and people sing and dance to it, even in the French-speaking part of the country. An example which hit the airwaves in 2003 and continues to do so, is the album of Agatha Moses entitled *Nigerian Praise*. It won the hearts of so many Cameroonians that the singer was invited to perform in Cameroon and drew large crowds. Of the various PCC members I met, some liked the rhythm, others the message, and others the dancing styles of the musician and her dancers. Because of the popularity of Nigerian gospel music, Cameroonian musicians (in a bid to satisfy their audience) now use similar rhythm and lyrics. For instance, the Molyko CYF group, inspired by *Nigerian Praise*, recently released their own album *Hour of Victory* with equal success.

Moreover, with the country's liberalisation of the audiovisual sector in April 2001,<sup>5</sup> pentecostals run a number of radio stations for evangelism. Most air-time is used either for broadcasting sermons of Nigerian pentecostal pastors or gospel music. One of the stations, Revival Gospel in Molyko, is relished in Buea and its environs for its moving sermons and Nigerian songs, which blare out in the streets. This has influenced the singing and dancing in the Molyko Presbyterian church, where some of the songs are adopted. Letters of appreciation pour in to the station manager I learnt in 2003, and a good many PCC members phone in to the request programmes, mostly asking for Nigerian pentecostal choruses. Nigerian movies also boost pentecostalism. For about 15 years now an estimated \$45 million-a-year film industry, nicknamed 'Nollywood' (like India's 'Bollywood') has developed in Nigeria. Nollywood is now the world's third-largest film industry in terms of production, which is currently up to 10 movies a week and each takes four to 10 days to make. Nigerian movies have become so popular among Africans that actors from other countries leave to act in Nigeria ([www.isureveille.com/vnews/display](http://www.isureveille.com/vnews/display); Muluh *et al* unpublished). According to a survey carried out in Molyko, about 96.6 per cent of the population prefer Nigerian videos. Reasons range from the messages they give to the fact that they show

a culture which people can easily identify with. Most of those with a Christian emphasis are based on pentecostal doctrine.

It is clear that the spiritual healing portrayed in these movies has had an impact on the Molyko PCC Christians. Moreover, with the prevalence of many diseases such as malaria and HIV/AIDS, this industry has contributed to making people believe that spiritual healing can be a solution to illnesses, particularly where all other efforts have failed.

Tatah Mbuy (a Roman Catholic cleric), writing in the *Cameroon Panorama* in February 2004 on the impact of Nigerian films on Anglophone Cameroon, adds that they have contributed to the mushrooming of charlatan pastors wanting to make a fortune on the back of what some of these movies suggest about spiritual healing. The industry, he says, has also made Cameroonian children grow up believing implicitly in faith healing. Even ritual utterances in the movies are catching on, where members of mainline Churches now find it normal to begin a prayer with “Praise the Lord”, “Amen” or “Halleluia” in pentecostal style.

The pentecostal practices being introduced in PCC congregations by ordinary congregants is often encouraged by the church leaders. For instance, on August 8, 2004, the pastor encouraged members to attend the mid-week prayer sessions for healing and giving testimonies. He endorsed the singing and dancing, saying they made the church very lively. With the congregation so close to the synod office, even including some of the office staff, Church authorities are certainly aware of this development.

The same pastor, however, did draw the line at the frequent use of pentecostal practices such as “Praise the Lord”, “Halleluia” and “Amen” during worship. When, on January 9, 2005, a CYF official gave an hour-long sermon (typical of pentecostalism) instead of the usual 15 to 20 minutes, and it was punctuated by shouts of “Praise the Lord” and “Halleluia” by the preacher with spontaneous “Amens” from the CYF and other members, there were mixed feelings. When the church session ruled against what they called “unpresbyterian” phrases, the pastor avoided having another CYF sermon – and the youth then disrupted the sermon that replaced it, and were suspended for three months. Interestingly, though, the impact was not all that deep. Some pentecostal practices were still allowed; and this is all the more remarkable considering that they imported not just from outside the Church but Cameroon.

### **Why the Authorities Rejected Earlier Attempts but Condone the Present Development**

Clearly the PCC is prepared to tolerate pentecostal practices that do not split a congregation or the Church as a whole. Unity appears to weigh more than some doctrinal or practical digressions. The moderator said as much to the *Presbyterian Newsletter* in discussing the PCC’s reservations about revivalism.

If those practices, which were being carried in the name of 'revival', had resulted in the overall growth and improvement of the church's condition, they would not have created any problem, unfortunately they rather diminished its growth.

There was no doubt that the 'born-again' and 'revival' movements divided the congregation and threatened the very survival not only of the congregation as a body but the church itself. The pentecostalisation of the Molyko congregation, on the other hand, is causing little or no division. It seems to be favoured by most members of the congregation and so far the Church authorities have not objected, perhaps sensing that if they did, this might undo the the congregation. Even the highly visible pentecostal practices of the youth are therefore tolerated. Compared to the previous cases it has yet, though very visible, to degenerate to a point where the authorities show serious concern.

Though the PCC authorities are very concerned with church unity, they seem simultaneously to accept doctrines and practices introduced from outside. According to the Reverend Awasom Henry (PCC moderator during the 'revival' crisis), not all pentecostal practices are acceptable in the PCC; if things like speaking in tongues were allowed, the church would be losing its cherished reformed traditions.

Rebaptism is another practice that is not acceptable to the PCC but is upheld by pentecostals, who argue that people can only be baptised if they are old enough to repent of sins and 'give their life' to Christ. The PCC, however, sees infant baptism as an important rite of initiation into Christianity, and rebaptism amounts to contradicting that view of what baptism is for. The PCC also prefers to baptise by sprinkling the head, as against the pentecostal way of total immersion in a pool. Pentecostals rebaptise anyone who was just 'sprinkled' (even as an adult), while the PCC accept people as baptised if they had been immersed.

Fortunately, rebaptism is not among the pentecostal practices being introduced in the Molyko congregation. In a number of interviews which I conducted in 2003 with 30 Molyko Christians, all the respondents upheld the PCC baptism method and would reject rebaptism in any form. Some said that they were born Presbyterians and as long as they remain in this faith they would abide by its method.

## **Conclusion**

This study has attempted to show that a gradual pentecostalisation process is taking place in the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, though the degree varies with congregations. It pointed to general changes in the PCC and also to those particularly taking place in the Molyko church. In that church the new style, which is championed by the youth movement and supported by the ordinary members,

takes the form of dancing and singing of pentecostal choruses, house-to-house evangelism, giving of testimonies, and spiritual healing, all typical of pentecostalism. There is a strong Nigerian influence, reflecting the fact that most of the pentecostal churches in Cameroon have their origin in Nigeria and there is much infiltration of Nigeria pentecostal literature, and songs, and movies portraying pentecostal practices such as spiritual healing and exorcism. Furthermore, with television and radio being liberalised in 2001, the pentecostals have opened up a number of radio stations for evangelism.

Most interesting is the fact that this development is coming from below and the Church authorities seem to allow it to pass in order to preserve Church unity. Evidently Church practice means less to the PCC than keeping its members (who mostly cherish the pentecostal style). PCC history after independence and before the Fomum controversy reveals instances of splinter groups. For instance, in the 1960s some members from the Bakweri ethnic group insisted, against the faith of the Church, on continuing to wear the fertility bangle.<sup>6</sup> After useless persuasion, the synod banned this practice. Disgruntled Christians reacted by breaking away to form the Cameroon Church of Christ. Also, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, some PCC members in Limbe wanted to impose the style of Anglican worship, and the synod banned it. The Anglican advocates and their followers then left the Church (Nyansako-Ni-Nku 1990). On top of all this comes the current pentecostal explosion, which has led to a continuous loss of mainline Church members to the new groups (Akoko 2002).

Tamfu Wilson, a pentecostal pastor, argues that the new spiritual revival in the PCC has enabled people to deepen their biblical understanding. He believes that mainline Churches have a weak grasp of the Bible, uncritically believing in inherited doctrines and practices and rejecting others as unbiblical. For him the PCC pentecostalisation is clearly a manifestation of salvation. Church members have discovered Christ and with this freedom are better able to interpret God's word and put it into practice.

Whatever the argument, it appears that PCC authorities are showing a greater openness to grassroots participation and decision-making. This may be linked to democratisation processes. The social and political implications of this may be that churches have become places where people are empowered to learn the sort of skills they need for democratic citizenship.

#### **Notes**

1. Until the economic crisis in Cameroon, pentecostal groups preached an ascetic gospel that had nothing to do with business ventures. They have now shifted to a gospel of prosperity and are deeply involved in businesses in a bid to raise money for their religious activities.
2. See Konings 2003.
3. For more on the south-west–north-west conflict, see Konings 2003; and Awasom 2001.
4. Canonical interdict is a penalty imposed by the Roman Catholic Church on any member, lay or clerical, who disobeys its governing rules as laid down in canon law. It could mean, for ex-



ample, being refused Church burial or the right to administer the sacraments. This is usually lifted when the individual shows proof of repentance or convalescence from his spiritual illness. In our context, the priest was punished for derailing faithfuls and for not obeying his bishop.

5. See Cameroon Laws 90/052 of December 19, 1990 and 2000/158 of April 3, 2000 on freedom of mass communication and its text of application respectively.
6. The Bakweri traditionally believed that the bangle and beads were sacred objects that could improve fertility and protect those who wore them. Christianity condemns the use of such objects but some Bakweri Christians insisted on not stopping the practice, which put them into conflict with various Christian groups.

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