

## **PENTECOSTALISM AND AFRICAN WORLDVIEW: THE TIV EXPERIENCE IN NIGERIA**

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### ***Abstract***

*The perception of the world on Pentecostalism in Africa is the embedment of African religion and culture. People's perception of the world around them shows how particular they understand the universe. The rise of Pentecostalism refers to the specific African precursors who were indigenous members of the mission denominations that contributed to the development and growth of Pentecostalism on the African continent. This paper, therefore, examines Pentecostalism and African worldview with particular reference to Tiv experience. By doing this, the research employed a qualitative research technique for the assemblage of data. The secondary sources came from books, journals, and periodicals. The research adapted historical and analytical methods for the presentation of the work. The work unveiled that before the advent of Christian mission in Tiv land, the Tiv people had their traditional religious beliefs, which was represented in Akombo (magical deities) and Tsav (witchcraft and sorcery), a collection of cosmic forces which seemed to provide further expression to the need to escape from*

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*diseases and death. It was also revealed that Pentecostalism, which has recently entered the Tiv land, has spread rapidly, whose population is threatening to overtake mainline churches of over 12 decades. The Tiv, in this respect, believes that nothing happens in the physical without being first contemplated and agreed in the spiritual. Moreso, the worldview that Tiv people practice through consultation with Mbatsav (witches and sorcerers), Adzov (spirits), and Akombo (magical deities) tallies with Pentecostal insistence on harmony that ought to exist between spirit, soul and body and the wellbeing of the spirit and soul depends on the actions and activities of the body in the present world. Therefore, it is recommended that the leadership of churches set committees to examine the practice of Pentecostal churches and ensure that they adopt practices that are in line with the scriptures.*

**Keywords: Pentecostalism, African Worldview, Tiv Experience.**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Pentecostalism as a global phenomenon is found almost in every part of the world with a related form of worship, organization and doctrines that characterize the movement. Pentecostalism is derived from the word “Pentecost”, which has its origin from the Greek word *pentecokoste*, which means fiftieth, is one of the most incredible Jewish feasts of weeks. The Jewish people celebrated the festival 50 days after the Passover (Ukpong 2008:60). The festival is observed in Christianity on the seventh Sunday (50th day) after Easter as the Holy Spirit’s descent. This reality is discovered through scholars’ works and writings in Pentecostalism, which has documented great literature pointing to this fact. Many suggestions explain Pentecostalism’s origin, growth, and expansion, as many scholars have on Pentecostalism.

The concept of Pentecostalism, according to Hollenweger (1997: 30), is a general term used to describe groups and sects which have placed emphasis on the speaking and receiving of sure gifts of the Holy Spirit, such

as speaking in tongues, prophesying and healing as a sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The movement is said to reflect the same kind of spiritual power and teaching in the Apostolic Age of the early church (Blumhofer, 1989: 30).

Anderson (2014:19) examines the historical background of Pentecostalism's emergence in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and its subsequent influence on mainline churches. This new distinctive spirituality that emerged was a form of reformation to renew the mainline churches' mandate. The need to show the relationship between Pentecostalism and the cultures of people's indifferent continents is emphasized. This emphasis points out that Pentecostalism recognizes and is in tune with such people's cultural milieu; therefore, this paper examines Pentecostalism and Africa worldview from the perspective of the Tiv experience.

## CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

### PENTECOSTALISM

Ayegboyin (1997:16) posits that the concept of Pentecostalism is "a general term used to describe the groups and sects which have placed emphasis on the speaking and receiving of certain gifts of the Spirit, such as speaking in tongues, prophecy and healing as a sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit", which excludes the mainline churches. On a general note, Pentecostalism is considered a movement to Christian renewal and sometimes classified by mainline churches as a Holiness Movement or the Born Again movement. Pentecostalism in its modern form has been one of the most significant new spiritual factors in the Christian church notable for the past five decades.

Many scholars like Hollenweger, Ateland others attribute the Pentecostal revolution to ideological struggle. Thus, those that conceive this movement as originating from ideological struggle note it as part of the protest against capitalism. As such, Pentecostal explosion from this perspective becomes a means of economic and political empowerment for the society especially, the handicapped. Hollenweger (1972:122) affirms this when he maintains that the function of overcoming personal and social disadvantages by a religious experience is exercised amongst all nations. The

statement above identifies Pentecostalism's evolution as a religious experience for people to overcome their personal and social disadvantages in life. They are accepted as Pentecostals not based on class or status in life but by membership (Atel 2004)

### **BRIEF HISTORY AND RELIGIOUS LIFE OF THE TIV PEOPLE IN NIGERIA**

The Tiv people, as an ethnolinguistic nation in Nigeria, occupy a substantial portion of the Middle Belt Region known as "The Benue Trough". They live on both sides of the River Benue North and South, the confluence of River Katsina-Ala. Agriculture is their primary livelihood source. They grow yams, beniseed, millet, and guinea-corn, among other crops on the Benue valley's fertile lands. They were the largest of the pagan ethnic group in the West-Central Sudan, and they too were in danger of being overrun by Islam (Gyanggyang, 2000:7). By 2006, the population of the Tiv was estimated to be 2,920,481. Traditionally, it is believed that the Tiv people migrated from SWEM, the East, on the hills of Cameroon. The Tiv people's migration story is similar to the Israelites' story when God delivered them as they crossed the Red Sea, as recorded in Exodus 14:13-31. Pever (2011) stated that:

Just as God delivered the Israelites and made them cross on the dry ground and their enemies, the Egyptians were drown, so it was with the Tiv people. When the enemies were chasing them, they came to a big river with no bridge to cross. So a snake went over the river and became a bridge for them to cross and all of them crossed successfully. But when their enemies wanted to cross they were drown for the bridge changed back to a snake (p.1).

It is pertinent to note that though this is a myth, Tiv people do not kill this particular snake called *Ikyarem*. Pever further stated that the snake is always friendly to any Tiv person. Besides, he argues that he has never heard or seen the snake bite any Tiv person. The Tiv cultural heritage story is often told by oral traditions, which rely heavily on memory. This classical history is a spoken description or an explanation of the origin of

the Tiv people. There had not been a written history at that time. Thus the narratives may lack factual, testable and verifiable contents (Dzurgba, 2007:11).

However, Torkula (2004:59) stated that although different views are held about the origin of Tiv, the version that commands popularity is the one that traces their origin to the Bantu people of the Central African Continent in the Shaba area of the present-day Democratic Republic of Congo. Their migration to the Benue Valley took them through to the mountainous region of *Swem* in South-Eastern Cameroon. This was characterized by series of wars, conquests, displacements of other ethnic groups who occupied the Benue Plains in the 1500AD. Torkula added that the British Colonial Administration halted the ease with which the Tiv people carried the conquest further north of River Benue.

Tiv people have a well-developed patrilineal genealogy traced to an ancient TIV individual who had two sons, *Ichongo* and *Ipusu*. All Tiv consider themselves a member of Ichongo (descendants of son Ichongo) or Ipusu (descendants of son Ipusu). Ichongo and Ipusu are divided into several major branches, which are divided into smaller branches. The minor branch, or minimum lineage, is the "*Ipaven*". Members of an *Ipaven* tend to live together in a local kin-based community which is called *Tar*. This form of social organization, called a segmentary lineage, is known in many African societies (Bohannan 1967:15).

The pre-colonial Tiv had no administrative divisions and no chiefs or councils. Leadership was based on age, influence and affluence. The leaders' functions were to furnish safe-conduct, arbitrate disputes within their lineages, sit on mats and lead their people in all external and internal affairs. These socio-political arrangements caused incredible frustration to British colonial attempts to subjugate the population and establish administration on the lower Benue. The Indirect Rule strategy that the British felt to be highly successful in controlling Hausa and Fulani population in Northern Nigeria was ineffective in a segmentary society like the Tiv. Colonial officers tried various approaches to administration, such as putting the Tiv under the control of the nearby Jukun and trying to exert control through the council of elders ("*IjirTamen*"); these met with little success.

Before the advent of the Christian mission in Tivland, the Tiv people had their traditional religion and developed culture and tradition before the Whiteman came into their land. The Tiv religion was represented in *Akombo* and *Tsav*, a collection of cosmic forces which seemed to provide further expression to the need to escape from disease and death. The Tiv looked at sin as an offence more concrete and seen as anti-social. However, the coming of Christianity has eroded the tradition and brought crisis into the Tiv people's culture. The Tiv's transformation brought disagreements in areas such as the concept of sin, in which the Tiv looked at sin as an anti-social vice, while Christians view sin as an offence against God. Another area of contention was how Christianity discarded the *Akombo* and *Tsav* practices of the Tiv people and eroded the authority of elders based on *tsav* power. Acceptance of Christianity's view meant the collapse of Tiv traditional worldview for new believers. This explains the initial resistance to the gospel by the Tiv people (Gyanggyang 2000:7).

One aspect of the Tiv people that made a lasting impression on the white man was their culture. Cassaleggo (1959) wrote:

It is an interesting phenomenon that the Tiv preserved the Bantu identity to a large extent, although they are surrounded by a strong Negro element. They kept their democratic way of life even though the Jukun, whose chief is a divine personification, had a controlling influence on the Tiv for many years (p.16).

They lived in small scattered family units as if they existed mutually independent of each other, but, should the need arise (like some emergency that threatened them), they would rapidly come together and defend themselves. Tiv people did not live individualistic life. The fortunes of each individual were reflected in the lives of all community members, and each community has a stake in the destiny of others. Apart from the Tiv's communality, the intense individualism of the Tiv also featured prominently in their worldview. The development of individual self-consciousness was not allowed to become a laudable value to the Tiv (Shii 2011:12). The misconception about Tiv people being lawless and keeping to themselves continued for many years among Europeans. Cassaleggo (1959) further wrote:

The Europeans who did not know the Tiv and their language had this impression for years. Years after Baïke, A.F. Mockler, a ferryman, wrote in his book, "Up the Niger" in 1892: The Mitsjhsare, a complicated people, to negotiate with they do not recognize anyone as paramount chief. They fear no one but are feared by all. The fear of their poisoned arrows keeps them almost free from attacks. Their poison, it is asserted, is one of the most effective in Africa (p.17).

It is pertinent to note that the negative impressions about the Tiv people of being fierce and warlike are born out of ignorance Baïke had with some Tiv people during the 1854 expedition. However, it is not an accurate picture of the Tiv people who are friendly, cheerful, contented and hospitable. This reflected in the communal life of all community members who have a stake in the destiny of others.

Wegh (1998:23) opines that Tiv as a word has a triple meaning. It is the name of the ethnic group; their language and the name stand for their ancestor-Tiv. Tivland covers about 30,000 square kilometres stretching from about 6°30' to 8-10° north latitude of 8 to 10° east longitude. We further point out that Tiv people constitute over 4 million individuals throughout Nigeria and the 4<sup>th</sup> largest ethnic group in Nigeria.

Tiv language is widely spoken in the Nigerian States of Benue, Plateau, Taraba, Nasarawa, Cross Rivers, and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Hagher (1990:18) states that one of the Tiv noble features of expansion has been that of inter-marriage with their host community.

Atel (2004:7) stated that neighbouring ethnic groups surround Tivland like the Alago, Angwe and Loro in the north; the various ethnic groups in Ogoja collectively known as Udam in the south, the Jukun, Chamba and Mumuye in the East and the Idoma and the Igala on the west respectively. The Tiv traditional headquarters in Gboko, where the TOR TIV, the chief of Tiv people, resides. The climatic condition in Tivland is determined by two major seasons: the rainy and the dry season. The rainy season starts in April and ends in October, while the dry season begins in November and ends in March of the following year. The temperature is usually between 80 and 90 degrees Fahrenheit.

Dzurgba (2007:175) asserts that Tiv acknowledges Aondo (God) as the Supreme Being who created the universe and directs its affairs. This belief is not different from the Christian concept of God. God is the primary cause of all the universe's events in general and in human affairs in particular. For instance, Aondo thunders, darkens the earth, flashes, shines the sun and blows the wind, among other things. "Tiv people believed that life was easy, harmonious and cordial in the beginning when God was very close to the earth, where he could be consulted easily". However, an act of a certain woman who was threshing millet hit God with a pestle that was offensive, and he ascended. This is the simple reason why God is far away from people now, and communication with him is no longer accessible. The Tiv people believe that God has given man power over his environment, and the natural order should function for man's good.

One way this can be ensured is through Akombo (a collection of cosmic forces) that God has given man. According to Dzurgba (2007:176), Akombo is divinities, which deal with human problems related to the peoples and their needs, such as health, food, water, wealth, safety, fertility, peace and other needs. Every aspect of the Tiv experience is related to a particular divinity. In the same vein, the Tiv people believe in *Azov*, who shares common cosmos with them and contributes to their society's ordering. East (1965:177) submits that *Azov* is spiritual beings capable of changing into any form at any time. Time, place or any other thing does not limit *Azov*. They can appear physically but disappear spiritually. Their mysterious world has everything that exists in the universe in abundance. These spiritual beings give generously to the people in need. As good as *Azov* seem to be, they also cause pain, sickness, poverty or sometimes death to some people who violate their laws, therefore imbibing both benevolent and malevolent characters. *Tsav* is also real among the Tiv people and occupies a prominent position in their social organization both ideologically and functionally.

## **PENTECOSTALISM AND AFRICAN WORLDVIEW**

African religion and culture are embedded in the African's perception of the world around him. Kraft (1992) defines worldview as "the culturally patterned basic understanding, for example, assumptions, presuppositions,



beliefs among others of reality by which the members of the society organize and live their lives “(p79). Achunike (2007) sees worldview as denoting “how a people articulate their perception of the world around them. It shows how a particular people understand their universe” (86). He further noted that the predominant worldview in Africa is religious cosmology. The traditional worldview of the African propels him/her to give attention to miracles (Achunike 2009:229). In summation, the views expressed above indicate that Africans perceive the world around them holistically, culturally and religiously. The mainline church missionaries, however, portrayed the dichotomy between religion and culture. With the advent of Pentecostalism, religion and culture were reintegrated, thereby coinciding with the African worldview. This coincidence between African worldview and Pentecostalism is what is termed African Pentecostalism.

The rise of African Pentecostalism refers to the specific African initiators or precursors who were indigenous members of the mission denominations that contributed to Pentecostalism’s development and growth on the African continent (Rudolf 1950:65). African Pentecostal movement utilized the threefold functions by becoming pastors, healers and solving the human needs of those who consult them. From this humble beginning with a small band of believers, Pentecostalism today has become a global phenomenon spreading increasingly through various sectors of the mainline churches, such as the Roman Catholics and the Protestants, with an estimated number of over 450 million followers (Barrett and Johnson, 1999). This is primarily because of the flexibility of spirit, which often allows them to develop their own culturally relevant expressions (Anderson, 2004:89). With its flexibility of spirit, the movement has an innate ability to make itself at home in almost any context. It has continued to expand in many different forms throughout the world. The Pentecostals’ intention to proffer solution to Africans is based on the theology to transform the lives and circumstances of its members as they encounter God through the help of the Holy Spirit.

Kwabena (2005:55) posits that the underlying African Pentecostal worldview emphasizes healing and deliverance, especially the belief in mystical causality that resonates with African philosophical thoughts. Afri-

can Pentecostalism answers Africans' religious needs by providing solutions to such issues as deliverance from witchcraft and marine spirits, exorcism, healing, among other things. These constitute essential elements in the life of Africans.

The above viewpoint captures the general African worldview and Pentecostalism. However, this work's scope focuses mainly on the Tiv worldview as it relates to Pentecostalism since the Tiv are the leading ethnic group that constitute a chunk of Christians.

### **PENTECOSTALISM AND TIV WORLDVIEW**

The Tiv ethnic group is the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria and inhabits the Benue valley. They number about 7 million people and constitute approximately 4.1% of Nigeria's population (Nigerian Population Commission: Census 2006). They are predominantly peasant farmers with Christian religious inclination. They form the leading ethnic group that attends the church, and the church's leadership is also exclusively drawn from this tribe. Research has shown that Pentecostalism, which has entered Tivland relatively recently, has spread rapidly. Its population is threatening to overtake that of the mainline churches of over 12 decades. The ease with which Pentecostal teaching is accepted in Tivland indicates some similarities in the Tiv worldview and Pentecostalism.

### **THE CONCEPT OF INTERWOVEN HAPPENINGS IN THE PHYSICAL AND THE SPIRITUAL WORLDS**

Tiv people believe that nothing happens physically without being first contemplated and agreed upon in the spiritual world. This accounts for the extensive consultations with *Mbatsav* (Witches and Wizards) and *Adzov* (Spirits). The collection of these cosmic forces give greater expression to the need to escape from disease and death. Matters in all spheres of life like Prosperity, Poverty, Marriages, Housing locations, Accidents, Deaths, among others, are first settled in the spirit world before their manifestations in the physical world (Rubingh, 1969:84). This agrees with the Pentecostal practice that emphasizes the power of agreement with Jesus to heal, deliver, restore, and transform an individual to health, wellbeing and

care (Kwabena, 2005:55). Kwabena adds that “salvation is holistic and include spiritual as well as physical abundance.”

### **THE TRIPARTITE INTERCONNECTIVITY OF HUMAN EXISTENCE IN BODY (*IYOL*), SOUL (*UMA*) AND SPIRIT (*JIJINGI*)**

This worldview that the Tiv people practice through consultations with Mbatsav (Witches and Sorcerers), *Adzov* (Spirits) and *Akombó* (Magical Deities) tallies with the Pentecostal insistence on the harmony that ought to exist between Spirit, Body and Soul; and on how the wellbeing of the Spirit and Soul in the present life and the life hereafter depends on the actions and activities of the body in the present life (Rubingh 1969: 84). This gives rise to the necessity of guidance and direction, which Pentecostalism eloquently provides through Prophets and other Men of God.

### **THE CONCEPT OF INTERCESSION**

Tiv people strongly believe in God (*Aondo*), the Almighty, creator of the universe who will always punish evil and reward good. All good comes from *Aondo*, and a good man is supposed to experience good health and prosperity at all times perpetually. A person experiences defeat, sufferings, calamities and afflictions only as a result of his wrongdoing. Sicknesses and afflictions are due to disobedience and violation of taboos which defile the person and sometimes the community and even the land. In such a situation, the person in question is expected to appease the gods to regain good health, restore prosperity, avoid death and cleanse the community and the land. Priests are responsible for this intercession which is done through sacrifices and divinations (Rubingh 1969:87). This worldview aligns with the Pentecostal view of intercession through prophets, prayer warriors and other men of God who do this mainly through prayer and fasting, laying of hands and deliverance.

### **THE CONCEPT OF MIRACLES**

One of the underlined factors that account for Pentecostalism's spread in Tivland is the similarity in the belief in miracles by both the Tiv and the

Pentecostals. Whereas the Pentecostals perform miracles through the Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ's name, the Tiv people believe and perform magic through priests making incantations to *Adzov* (Spirits). *Ahir* (Magic). Sessions are sometimes accompanied by music but can also be done silently with simple or powerful gesticulations (Rubingh 1969:88). This is also similar to the Pentecostal miracle sessions that are either affected silently or with loud music and powerful prayers, and repetitive commands.

### **TIV WORLDVIEW ON USE OF MUSIC**

Tiv culture stands out in the Nigerian context due mainly to its music and its love for dancing. Music is one of the high points of the culture and is used not only for entertainment but also for relaxation, communication, praise, healing, and worship of ancestral gods, among many other uses. Music and its accompanying songs are used as historical landmarks in dating events. It is also used in motivating workforces and providing the impetus for stamina and resilience during strenuous tasks like farming. Worship in mainline Churches, however, used music and was mainly solemn. Church hymns were sung solemnly and piously without the vibrancy of the Tiv traditional worship session. However, this unexpressive worship mode was broken on Pentecostalism's arrival, which gave room to clear and dynamic self-expressive mode akin to the authentic Tiv worship sessions with music and dancing (Rubingh 1969:88).

### **CONCLUSION**

This paper has examined Pentecostalism and the African worldview concerning the Tiv experience. Pentecostalism recently entered the Tiv land, and it has been able to spread rapidly whose population is threatening to overtake mainline churches of over 12 decades. The Tiv, in this respect, believes that nothing happens in the physical without being first contemplated and agreed in the spiritual, which is in agreement with the assertions of present-day Pentecostalism. Moreso, the worldview that Tiv people practice through consultation with *Mbatsav* (witches and sorcerers), *Adzov* (spirits), and *Akombo* (magical deities) tallies with Pentecostal insistence on harmony that ought to exist between spirit, soul and body and the wellbeing of the spirit and soul depends on the actions and activities of the

body in the present world. Therefore, it is expedient that churches set committees to examine the practices of Pentecostal churches and ensure that they adopt practices that are in line with the scriptures.

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