

**God in the city:  
Pentecostalism as an urban phenomenon in Kenya**

*Damaris Seleina Parsitau*  
Department of History, Philosophy and Religious Studies  
Egerton University, Njoro, Kenya

*Philomena Njeri Mwaura*<sup>1</sup>  
Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies,  
Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya

*Abstract*

This article focuses on contemporary Kenyan Pentecostal Christianity, and depicts it as an urban phenomenon geared to meet the needs of urban Kenyans, particularly those from the middle and working classes. It explores the origins and characteristics of the Deliverance Church of Kenya (DCK), one of the largest Pentecostal churches in Kenya, and one which has penetrated major towns and urban centres in the country. The article also discusses important features of modern Pentecostalism and argues that these features only favour urban environments. The article argues that Kenyan Pentecostalism has learned not only to survive in whatever socio-cultural and economic circumstances it finds itself, but has also, in fact, learned to thrive in such circumstances. Moreover, in its quest for relevance in rapidly changing times, Kenyan Pentecostalism has established a niche for itself in urban Kenya. The article concludes that Pentecostalism, as a modern and urban movement, caters for the needs of upwardly mobile youth and helps to expose and connect them to the modern world of commodities, media and financial flows – without being overwhelmed by it.

**Introduction**

Since the 1970s there has been an explosion of Pentecostalism – both globally and, especially, in the countries of the global South: notably Africa, Asia and Latin America. This new wave of Pentecostalism has been labelled

---

<sup>1</sup> Academic Associate at the Department of Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern Studies, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

as “charismatic” or “neo-Pentecostal Christianity” and has become a significant phenomenon on the African continent. In Kenya, Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity<sup>2</sup> has become a prominent feature of the country’s religious and political landscape and now commands a massive following, especially in urban Kenya. Nevertheless, while Kenyan neo-Pentecostalism is essentially an urban affair, the movement (which normally starts in urban centres) has recently begun to penetrate the rural areas and villages also.

This article discusses Kenyan Pentecostalism as an urban and modern phenomenon by focusing on one “mega” urban charismatic church, the Deliverance Church of Kenya. It begins by examining the roots, growth and characteristics of Kenyan neo-Pentecostalism in a rapidly modernising Kenyan society, and attempts to relate this form of Christianity to other global developments such as globalisation and modernisation. It argues that Pentecostalism in Africa (and in Kenya in particular) attempts not only to survive, but also to thrive in a globalised and modernised world. Pentecostal Christianity achieves this quite easily owing to its apparent flexibility and ability to adapt to changing cultural and social environments. This point appears to be corroborated by Anderson’s claims that Pentecostalism’s inherent flexibility means that it is more easily able to adjust to any context, even when the context is a rapidly changing one, as is the case in many cities of the global South.<sup>3</sup> Harvey Cox,<sup>4</sup> a leading scholar of religion, also argues that Pentecostalism represents an especially effective response to the contemporary world, which potentially points the way forward to forms of human spirituality and religious practice that will become increasingly influential in the twenty-first century. Ruth Marshall<sup>5</sup> similarly notes that these churches project a new vision of the world, responding in particular to processes of modernity and modernisation. What is interesting is that this form of Pentecostalism has given birth to hundreds, perhaps thousands, of churches in Kenya.

I have chosen to focus on the Deliverance Church of Kenya because of its immense growth and expansion and because, despite its tremendous influence on the lives of a section of Kenyans in urban areas, it has received little attention from scholars of religion. Furthermore, the Deliverance

---

<sup>2</sup> While Pentecostal Christianity was introduced to Kenya by American Missionaries in the early twentieth century, a new wave of revival within Christianity in Africa, since the 1970s to the present, has resulted in a new type of Pentecostalism that has been variedly labelled as “charismatic” or “neo-Pentecostal”. This is what is addressed in this article. The preferred term for the phenomena is “charismatic” Christianity or churches.

<sup>3</sup> Allan H. Anderson, “African Initiated Pentecostalism and Charismatics in South Africa”, in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 35, no. 1, 2005, pp.66-92.

<sup>4</sup> Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the reshaping of religion in the twenty first century*, London: Cassell, 1996.

<sup>5</sup> Ruth Marshall, “Pentecostalism in Southern Nigeria: An Overview”, in Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: its public role*. London: Hurst and Company, 1998, pp.7-32.

Church, like all churches, has been influenced by its history and unique ministry – a ministry that has attracted thousands of people to its fold. Founded in the early 1970s, the church has expanded within and beyond Kenya, and has the allegiance of Kenyans in the Diaspora.

Data for this article was obtained from interviews with church members, former members, church leaders, critics and sympathisers. We participated in many church services as participant observers. The church also has a website with information on its history, mission, teachings, ethos and activities. It also publishes a variety of newsletters, magazines and records, the perusal of which gave us a considerable amount of information about the DCK. Other information was obtained from the church's numerous TV programmes, videotapes, audiotapes, CDs and other electronic media.

### **The roots of Kenyan neo-Pentecostalism**

In the last three decades, a new breed of Pentecostalism has emerged not only in Kenya, but also in Africa and, in fact, the rest of the world. This new breed has been designated as “modern Pentecostalism”, “neo-Pentecostalism” and “charismatic Christianity” to distinguish it from the classical Pentecostal churches of the early twentieth century. One feature that distinguishes neo-Pentecostalism from the older form is its concentration in urban areas. In fact, for most of its history, neo-Pentecostalism has been an urban affair that has largely drawn its clientele from what Lovemore Togarasei<sup>6</sup> calls the “urban middle classes, the elite and fairly educated populations”. But it gets the bulk of its membership from high-density areas or the slums of major towns in Kenya such as Nairobi, Nakuru, Eldoret, Nyeri and Kisumu. According to newspaper reports, the Registrar General's office is overwhelmed by increasing demands for registration of these new churches.<sup>7</sup>

The Attorney General Amos Wako, speaking in a workshop for church leaders, revealed that the department is overwhelmed by an increasing demand for registration of these churches and the facility is facing difficulties in processing 6,740 pending applications by various religious organisations.<sup>8</sup> Wako revealed that there are approximately 8 520 registered churches and that about 60 applications are filed every month. He added that a temporary embargo on registration of new churches and related organisations has caused an increasing backlog. Thousands of these churches have sprouted in all major urban centres, some within less than three to five kilometres of each

---

<sup>6</sup> Lovemore Togarasei, “Modern Pentecostalism as an Urban Phenomenon: The case of the Family of God Church in Zimbabwe”, in *Exchange: Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research*, Vol. 34, no. 4, 2005, 350.

<sup>7</sup> A. Ndegwa, “Over 6000 churches awaiting registration”, *The Standard*, 4<sup>th</sup> September 2007,<sup>6</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Ndegwa, *ibid.*

other. Some are huge “mega churches”, while others are too small to be called churches as such, although they add to the number of applications.

Due to the proliferation of neo-Pentecostal churches, Kenya has evolved a strong Pentecostal and charismatic tradition, as is evidenced by the numerous open-air rallies, crusades, revival meetings, miracle centres, healing ministries, street preaching and, more recently, televangelism, all of which have become a significant feature of Kenyan Pentecostalism.<sup>9</sup> Writing about Nigeria, Marshall observes that

literally thousands of new churches and evangelical groups have cropped up in cities and towns forming broad-based religious movements which are rapidly becoming a powerful new social and religious force.<sup>10</sup>

Although Marshall is writing about Nigeria, this observation also reflects the realities of the Kenyan context.

Since the 1980s, but more significantly since the 1990s until now, Pentecostal and charismatic churches, fellowships and ministries have proliferated throughout the country. Examples of Pentecostal and charismatic churches in Kenya are the Deliverance Churches, Neno Evangelism Ministries, Maximum Miracles Ministries; Jesus is Alive Ministries, The Happy Churches, Faith Evangelistic Ministries, Redeemed Gospel churches and the Winners Chapel International Ministries. These Pentecostal and charismatic movements in Kenya currently constitute a large Christian constituency that commands hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of followers. According to the *Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life Survey*, the Pentecostal/charismatic movement accounts for more than half of Kenya’s population. The survey also found that approximately seven in ten Protestants in Kenya are either Pentecostal or charismatic, and about a third of Kenyan Catholics surveyed can be classified as charismatics.<sup>11</sup> The growth of neo-Pentecostal Christianity is not only numerical, but its impact on ecclesiastical and social life has also grown tremendously.

The explosion of neo-Pentecostalism that has occurred since the 1970s is due to a combination of socio-religious factors, including the emergence of younger, university evangelical Christian leadership, rapid urbanisation and the collapse of African economies. This growth has also been fuelled by aggressive evangelism, church planting, lay mobilisation, lively music and

---

<sup>9</sup> Alward Shorter and Joseph Njiru, *New religious movements in Africa*, Nairobi: Paulines, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Marshall op.cit.

<sup>11</sup> *Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life*: Pentecostalism in Kenya. <http://pewforum.org>

the celebratory nature of worship.<sup>12</sup> Many of them have grown tremendously both numerically and institutionally to become mega churches that are run like business corporations. Their influence has also invaded all aspects of Kenyan civic life and their presence is now being felt in the realm of politics, economics, cultural and socio-religious fields. Kenyan Pentecostalism is therefore poised to impact not only on African Christianity, but also on religion and politics – and in a significant way.

### **Distinguishing features of neo-Pentecostalism**

A distinguishing feature of neo-Pentecostalism in Kenya and which, perhaps, explains its appeal to masses of people is its apparent concern with economic deprivation. It has been argued that Pentecostalism represents a popularised form of Christianity which provides for the needs of the impoverished masses, especially those living in the urban centres of Third World countries<sup>13</sup>. The proponents of this school of thought argue that Pentecostalism, in different ways, provides psychological and sometimes practical help to the poor, those on the fringes of society, and those who perceive themselves as deprived.<sup>14</sup> Above all, Pentecostalism helps people to survive both socially and psychologically, since it provides participation, mutual support, emotional release and a sense of identity and dignity for a vast range of social groups.

It would therefore appear that some of the reasons behind the attraction of the urban poor to these churches is the link between Pentecostalism and poverty; this point is well captured in Wolfe's reflection that Pentecostalism provides many urban poor with intense spiritual and psychical experiences that serve as a genuine source of meaning and comfort in lives that are otherwise depressing and marginalised.<sup>15</sup> Adeboye Olufunke, on the other hand, argues that the failure of the state as an agent of modernisation enlarged "the political space for religious actors" who minister not only to individual needs, but also diagnose and prescribe spiritual remedies for the political and economic problems of the nations.<sup>16</sup> From the above analysis,

---

<sup>12</sup> Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Born of Water and the Spirit: Pentecostal /Charismatic Christianity in Africa" in Ogbu u. Kalu, (ed.) *African Christianity: An African story*. Trenton New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2007, 389.

<sup>13</sup> S.J Hunt, "Deprivation and Western Pentecostalism Revisited; The Case of 'Classical' Pentecostalism", *Pentecostal Studies*, vol. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Hunt, *ibid*.

<sup>15</sup> J. Wolfe "Evangelical s and Pentecostals: Indigenizing a Global Gospel, in John Wolfe (ed.), *Global religious movements in regional context*. London: Ashgate: The Open University Press, 2006,79

<sup>16</sup> Olufunke, A. "Pentecostal Challenges in Africa and Latin America: A Comparative Focus on Nigeria and Brazil", *CODESSRIA Africa Zamani*, Nos. 11 &12, 136-159.

therefore, one could correctly argue that there is a direct relationship between Pentecostalism and specific social groups, particularly the urban poor.

Another distinguishing feature of modern or neo-Pentecostalism is its appeal to the youth. These churches are largely youth churches and are marked by a strong youthful orientation. Asamoah-Gyadu claims that leaders of student Christian movements in schools and colleges are the founders of these churches and, having started as young movements, they have remained dominated by the youth.<sup>17</sup> Togarasei also argues that the youth in neo-Pentecostal churches comprise people in the 12 to 35 year-old category.<sup>18</sup> In Kenya, the majority of church leaders are relatively young and the bulk of the membership is youthful. For example, the Deliverance Church was started by young people and about 80% of the church is currently constituted by young people. The founders have kept close contacts with the youth and direct much of their ministry to the young. In other words, Kenyan neo-Pentecostalism is not only an urban phenomenon, but is also a youthful movement that strives to meet the needs – spiritual and non-spiritual – of Kenyan youth. Having been founded by reasonably well-educated urban youth, these churches tend to remain (urban) elitist and modernist movements.

A further feature of modern Pentecostalism is its openness to modernity. Many Pentecostal churches have embraced modernity and are thoroughly modern in their outlook. Asamoah-Gadu observes that these churches display “an ardent desire to appear successful, reflecting a modern outlook and portraying an international image”. He further notes that the new Pentecostal churches

have a special attraction for Africa’s upward mobile youth, a lay-oriented leadership, ecclesiastical office based on a person’s charismatic gifting, innovative use of modern media technologies, particular concern with congregational enlargements, and a relaxed fashion code for members.<sup>19</sup>

This is even better supported by the fact that these churches use English as the language of western modernity to propagate their message.<sup>20</sup> However, while English remains the preferred language, preaching is done in Kiswahili. Songs in the English language are heavily appropriated and then translated into Kiswahili and a number of other Kenyan vernacular languages, which is, perhaps, an attempt to contextualise the gospel to local circumstances. This is particularly true in the urban centres, where the youth feel a special attraction

---

<sup>17</sup> Asamoah-Gyadu, *op. cit.*

<sup>18</sup> Togarasei, *op. cit.*, 360-361.

<sup>19</sup> Asamoah-Gyadu *op. cit.*, 392

<sup>20</sup> In Kenya, however, Kiswahili, as the national language is also used, along with a host of other vernacular languages.

to these churches because of their use of English and their appropriation of mass media communication technologies. Togarasei adds that the youth in these churches are privileged to have access to these forms of modernity (because of the level of literacy in the country). Young elites, potential elites and frustrated graduates therefore find that these churches address their needs in a way that other institutions and bodies cannot.<sup>21</sup>

Another distinguishing feature of African Pentecostalism is its capacity for social transformation and change. When it comes to social transformation through Pentecostal influence, studies carried out in Africa, Asia and Latin America in particular have illustrated Pentecostalism's ability and potential to facilitate social upward mobility which, in turn, empowers the individuals involved and which has a transformative effect at a communal level. Wonsuk Ma, writing about the Philippines, observes that the Pentecostal approach to the individual, family and social transformation has been remarkably effective. This type of Christianity has empowered the marginalised masses in a holistic manner and, as a result, many urban poor are now middle-class citizens.<sup>22</sup>

In Kenya, as in Asia, this trend is also noticeable and some Pentecostal Christians have advanced in terms of their socioeconomic status. Credit for this is owed partly to the gospel of prosperity and divine blessing that many of these churches support and preach. Pentecostal televangelists in Kenya, such as Bishops Mark Kariuki, JB Masinde, Margaret Wanjiru and Wilfred Lai, who are exponents of this theology, have challenged the urban poor to believe in a mighty God who will meet all their physical and spiritual needs. The gospel of prosperity, for all its flaws and abuses, has – surprisingly – attracted large followings into these churches in search of this God who meets all their needs “according to his riches in Glory by Christ Jesus”.<sup>23</sup> It has challenged people to rise above their social deprivations and believe in their own agency. Olufunke further corroborates this view when he observes that the gospel of prosperity and its promise of social mobility appeals more to the young, the youth and the young at heart.<sup>24</sup>

Another unique characteristic of these churches is their willingness to use any empty urban space, especially space that is normally considered as unconventional for worship purposes. Such spaces include cinema halls, theatres, nightclubs, hotels, schools, stadia, public parks and gardens and abandoned warehouses. In fact, these churches have invaded public space and turned them into religious space as if religion, too, is competing and laying claim on urban space. This occupying of vacant urban space has produced

---

<sup>21</sup> Togarasei, *op.cit.*,361

<sup>22</sup> Wonsuk Ma “ Doing Theology in the Philippines: A Case of Pentecostal Christianity”, *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, vol. 8, no.2 2005,pp. 215-233

<sup>23</sup> Philippians 4:19

<sup>24</sup> Olufunke, *op.cit.*,137

hundreds, if not thousands, of new Pentecostal and charismatic churches in Kenya's major urban centres, and now forms a network of broad-based religious movements that is rapidly becoming a powerful new social and religious force. In the Langas slums of Eldoret town in the northern parts of Kenya's Central Rift Valley, for example, there are more than 50 houses of worship (some very tiny) crowded within a few metres of each other. The same trend is visible in Nakuru, Nairobi, Eldoret, Kisumu and Nyeri. In Nakuru town alone there are close to 200 such churches within a distance of less than two kilometres.

The hotel industry is doing a booming business thanks to the Pentecostal churches, which frequently hire conference rooms. The larger Pentecostal churches, such as the Redeemed Gospel Church, the Deliverance Church of Kenya, Jesus is Alive Ministries and the Maximum Miracle Centre, hold conferences in "posh" hotels such as the Laico Regency, Intercontinental, Bontana, Merica, Sirikwa and others. Hundreds of their guests, especially overseas visitors, regularly book into these hotels. Many of these churches are also investing in building their own guesthouses and conference centres (which, in time, they plan to rent out).

Another distinguishing feature of Pentecostal Christianity is its increasing appropriation of new communication technologies and other media in the transmission of its message. Such technologies include religious broadcasting through the television, radio, internet, e-mail, mobile phones, fax and telephone. Pentecostal churches also make free use of print material, which has led to the emergence of all types of religious literature. The electronic church phenomenon has also taken Kenyans by storm and many now have eye-catching websites full of information about their churches, their histories and biographies of founders. For example, the Deliverance Church uses televangelism as an evangelistic tool and the overseer, Bishop Mark Kariuki's programme *Celebration Times*, is broadcast on Kenya TV (KBC TV) every Sunday at 09.00 am, Wednesdays at 09.30 pm, and on Family TV on Thursdays at 03.00 pm. Bishop J.B. Masinde (of Umoja Deliverance Church) has a programme called *Refreshing Times*, which is broadcast on national TV (on Sundays at 4.45pm).

Deliverance Church has also embraced computer technologies such as the e-mail and the World Wide Web in order to enhance its message and reach a wider audience. The consumption of computer technology has therefore made the church a major popular "consumer" of ICT and the business community now tends to focus on the churches when it seeks to sell the latest computer gadget.<sup>25</sup> Religious leaders in these churches have established themselves in the "information superhighway" and are adapting this communication channel to win the support of Kenyans, particularly the youth, who

---

<sup>25</sup> Nyaundi, op.cit., 313

are “into” ICT. Adogame notes that, although the use of various media is not entirely novel, these churches’ efforts towards making their presence known and felt on the worldwide web area.<sup>26</sup> Bishop Mark Kariuki of the Deliverance Church of Kenya argues that, if goods can be sold and bought online, souls can also be saved online.<sup>27</sup> The rapid growth and sophistication of electronic technology witnessed in the last decades has had an outstanding impact on all spheres of life, but especially in placing the charismatic churches in the public space. Most preachers from these churches agree that the technological advancement witnessed now has made the spread of the gospel today far more cost-effective than it was even a few years ago.

Bishop JB Masinde of the Deliverance Church of Kenya, Umoja, believes that Christianity, particularly the Pentecostal/charismatic variety, will eventually become an e-religion in the future.<sup>28</sup> He further claims that IT helps reach more people in the most unlikely places (e.g. bars, hotel rooms and prisons). The internet is bound to impact on religion in a big way and Pentecostals are aware of this. Many churches in Kenya, especially the Pentecostal ones, have websites of their own. These sites are accessible to congregations and other audiences at the touch of a button and are usually displayed on television screens at the end of every televised message. This usually targets the growing number of “cyber-worshippers”, especially the youth who are intensely interested in modern information technology.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the internet is the “in-thing” in Kenya, especially among young generations who constitute the largest membership of Pentecostal churches. Many of these churches are using the internet as an avenue of evangelism by offering biblical teachings and other religious materials online. Pentecostal organisations also use the internet for public relations, given that the internet is particularly suitable for question-and-answer interactions.

Locally, Kenyan web designers are cashing in on the churches’ interest in new technologies by creating eye-catching websites for them. The churches and Christian organisations that have already launched their own websites include: the Bible Society of Kenya, at [www.forministry.com](http://www.forministry.com); Bishop Margaret Wanjiru’s Jesus Is Alive Ministries at [www.jiam.org](http://www.jiam.org); DCK at [www.dc.org](http://www.dc.org); and Family TV at [www.familykenya.com](http://www.familykenya.com). Sermons and other messages are posted on these websites. The internet has also created a virtual church where many people are clicking their way to God from the comforts of their homes or their living room. The virtual church may be at its infancy

---

<sup>26</sup> Afe Adogame, “African Christian Communities in Diaspora”, in Ogbu U. Kalu, *African Christianity: An African story*, Pretoria: Department of Church History, University of Pretoria Press, 2005, 510

<sup>27</sup> Oral Interview, Bishop Mark Kariuki, August 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Bishop J.B.Masinde, Oral Interview, Nakuru, 2006.

<sup>29</sup> Nyaundi, 2003., p 313

in Kenya, but it has the potential to be at the forefront of church growth in the next decade.

Kenyan Pentecostal/charismatic churches are also increasingly using electronic mail (e-mail), short text messages (SMS) and mobile phones to spread their version of the gospel. The development and use of these methods of communication are some of the church leader's ways of creating a sense of personal relationship between them and their followers. For instance, church leaders send text messages to their followers, especially when they need funding for numerous church projects, or to pass on the word concerning the visit of a famous western evangelist or to give out the time and place of an impromptu meeting. Such a mode of communication is faster, cheaper and far more cost effective than conventional written messages. Among upmarket church goers, there is also an escalation of Personal Data Assistants that are loaded with software versions of the Bible. This is popular with youthful pastors and the televangelists who globetrot the world and buy this software when they visit churches in the First World. As a result of this technological explosion, a new category of church employees has been created: sound technicians, computer and software specialists and maintenance staff, and light control board technicians.

The mass media has therefore ushered in a new chapter in Kenya's religious history and has revolutionised the way Kenyans, especially those who belong to the neo-Pentecostal tradition, are receiving and experiencing religion. The increasing appropriation of mass media technologies by Pentecostal Christianity as an alternative evangelistic strategy is, as Adogame explains, tied to new, global socio-cultural realities<sup>30</sup>. Because, as Meyer so aptly argues, the success of religion in modern societies appears to depend on its ability to locate itself and spread in the marketplace of culture. This development, as she observes, raises serious questions about how to conceptualise religion in modern societies.<sup>31</sup> The use of mass media technologies only favours urban and modern environments and therefore reinforces the fact that Pentecostalism is indeed an urban affair.

Kenyan Pentecostalism, too, is essentially an urban phenomenon as is evidenced by hundreds of these movements that have mushroomed in almost all the major towns and cities in Kenya. It has also remained an urban-elitist and modernist movement. Although not everyone who attends these churches is rich or even modestly educated, the church appears to attract those who are seeking both success and prosperity in life, as Gifford observes about the Deliverance Church of Kenya and the Redeemed<sup>32</sup> Gospel Church. Seekers and followers are also attracted to these churches by their lively and

---

<sup>30</sup> Adogame, 2005, p 510

<sup>31</sup> Meyer, 2004.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Gifford, *Christianity Politics and Public Life in Kenya*, London: Hurst & Company, 2009, p 131.

refreshing music and their teachings on prosperity. These new churches are generally led by educated young men and women, often university graduates, who have come into an experience of the Spirit as a result of their involvement in interdenominational campus organisations.<sup>33</sup> The Pentecostal churches in the urban centres and townships are attractive to young people growing up in fast-moving and rapidly modernising Kenyan society. These churches have succeeded in creating a niche in the religious market that has not been met by other churches. What then is the Deliverance Church of Kenya? It is to this question that we shall now turn.

### **The Deliverance Church of Kenya**

The Deliverance Church was founded on 22 of November 1970 by a group of young men and women known as the Young Ambassadors Christian Fellowship (YACF). These were young Christians who had been excommunicated from mainline churches because they had embraced “strange” Pentecostal phenomenon and spirituality such as speaking in tongues, and exuberant forms of singing and dancing. The first meeting comprised 56 people and they met at Kariokor Social Hall, Nairobi. Its first designated leader was Joe Kayo, a poorly educated evangelist who was converted to Christianity in a T.L. Osborn crusade. Kayo left the church in 1977 under unclear circumstances.<sup>34</sup> The Deliverance Church of Kenya is a classic example, therefore, of a fellowship that emerged from the fringes of mainline Christianity to become one of the largest Pentecostal churches in Kenya today. Many people interviewed claimed that they were attracted to this church by its lively worship, refreshing music and its teachings which, they said, meets their needs.

The name Deliverance is derived from Luke 4:8, which refers to Jesus’s deliverance of the “captives”. The term reflects the primary task of the church and mission. The task is to preach the good news to the poor and deliver the oppressed. Upon its birth, the DCK immediately embarked on evangelistic missions to win converts and preach the gospel throughout the country, a venture that rapidly led to tremendous growth – both numerically and institutionally. From its very inception to date, the DCK has focused much of its attention on the youth – in schools, colleges and universities. It has over 600 branches spread across the entire country, and has a particularly strong presence in the major towns and cities. The DCK is now found in South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique, Uganda and Tanzania, Britain and North America. In a period spanning about three-and-a-half decades, the DCK has grown enormously to become one of the largest Pentecostal

---

<sup>33</sup> Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005, p 389

<sup>34</sup> Gifford, op.cit. 131.

churches in the country. Such spectacular and speedy success can be attributed to a combination of vibrant Pentecostal worship, dynamic leadership, concern for the youth, and diverse ministries that provide both individual and communal support in a rapidly urbanising society.

### **Leadership structure of the Deliverance Church**

The immense growth and expansion of this church has necessitated certain changes such as decentralisation for better administration. Initially, the DCK was run by a church board. It is now divided into nine geographical zones (referred to as “regions”). These are: the Nairobi Region under Bishop J.B. Masinde, the Western Region under Reverend Paul Oselu, the South-Rift Region under Reverend Benjamin Kipruto, the Central Rift region under Reverend Francis Kanyingi, the Mt. Kenya Region under Reverend Gideon Mbaabu, the North-Rift region under Reverend George Gichana, the Central Region under Bishop Simon Kaniaru, the Coast Region under Reverend S.M. Mbega and the Eastern Region under Julius Manthi. Together, with the current General Overseer of all Deliverance Churches of Kenya, Bishop Mark Kariuki, the above ten leaders constitute the Deliverance Church Council (DCC). Each of these leaders is in charge of all the churches in the region and the leader oversees its administration, growth, expansion and development. Each Deliverance Church is, however, autonomous and is run by a senior pastor and his assistant, although they recognise the spiritual head or overseer (Bishop Mark Kariuki). Each local church also pays a tithe of 10% to the general secretariat (i.e. the church headquarters).

The structure of the church also reflects its urban character. Most of the Deliverance churches, particularly the “mega churches”, resemble successful business ventures or enterprises. They are large institutions with various ministries such as TV ministries, transport departments, schools and colleges (especially Bible schools and computer colleges), clinics and health centres. Gifford’s observations, namely, that some neo-Pentecostal churches or religious networks function in the same way as the new global industries such as banking, law, health, sport, technology and science and high education, also apply to the DCK.<sup>35</sup>

### **Deliverance Church as a local church**

Notwithstanding its size, the DCK is a local church founded locally by local people as a result of local initiatives. It is also managed by indigenous people and, as Bishop Masinde argues, the fact that they don’t answer to a

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 150-159

missionary somewhere gives them a local identity.<sup>36</sup> This indigenous church exhibits the three characteristics of a local church: self-propagating, self-governing, and self-supporting. Church finances come largely through tithes and offerings and also from profits from many church projects, such as poultry keeping, running schools and colleges, clinics and health centres and transport businesses. Some of these development projects (e.g. schools and colleges, public transport and health clinics) were started without any outside help. At the same time, the local church is autonomous. Although the larger Deliverance Church works as an organisation, each local church is free to conduct its own programmes. This freedom allows each church to explore and maximise its potential.

### **Mission and evangelism**

The DCK considers itself an evangelical church with mission as its central focus. As a missionary church it sends out missionaries to all parts of the country and beyond. André Droogers has pointed out that one of the characteristics of Pentecostal churches is their rapid expansion through aggressive evangelism.<sup>37</sup> Because of its urban and modernist character, the church has fully utilised the forces of globalisation to propagate itself. These forces favour an urban environment and the church has not hesitated to use them. As an evangelistic and mission-oriented church, the DCK has evolved aggressive ministries aimed at evangelising the entire world. One large banner in the church reads “*We are world changers*”; and every member is urged to confess “*I am a missionary*”. These confessions are further reinforced by the church’s mission statement, which is proclaimed on one of the many banners hanging on the walls: “*Life Celebration Centre (LCC) exists to reconcile people to God, equipping them for ministry both to God and the people*”. Another huge banner reads “*Get your passport ready*” – because you never know when God will call you as a missionary to the nations. This huge banner hangs behind the pulpit and next to a host of flags of various nations which, the church teaches, its missionaries might be sent, by God, to evangelise. In this case, then, there is a sense in which Kenyan Pentecostal churches re-image themselves as missionaries who God will use to evangelise not only Africa, but America, Europe and Asia and, indeed, the entire world. The church has several outreach and evangelistic programmes: operation save-a-soul, world changers, single ladies ministries, men of faith ministries and daughters of faith ministries. All these ministries aim at increasing church growth and reaching the non-evangelised.

---

<sup>36</sup> Oral Interview, J.B.Masinde, August 2006

<sup>37</sup> André Droogers, “Globalization and the Pentecostal” in *In the name of God - lies, frauds, atrocities; the truth shall set you free*. [www.davidicke.com](http://www.davidicke.com). Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> August 2008.

**Youth ministry**

Deliverance Church Kenya is, as we have said already, a youth church and the majority of the church members are young people and women. This church remains a major attraction to the Kenyan youth, because it offers them a version of ministry that is not available elsewhere. It addresses needs that are relevant to marginalised young people by providing them with outings such as youth camps, conferences, youth concerts and youth nights (where they are entertained, counselled, trained and even have the opportunity to meet prospective spouses).<sup>38</sup> To address the needs of the youth effectively, this church divides the youth into various categories and age groups. Every Sunday different meetings are held for the preteens, teens, youth, and senior youth. Other times, and especially during school holidays, the church has holiday camps that target college and school leavers and those on brief vacations. Camps for children and youth camps are aimed at keeping these categories busy during school holidays, as well as providing them with spiritual and moral guidelines at crucial stages of their development.

The DCK holds national youth conferences yearly during Easter or Christmas holidays to provide members with life skills and provide them with spiritual nourishment. In short, there is “something for everybody” in the DCK. There are also various youth activities such as sports, all-night prayers, popularly called “Keshas”, youth parties, popularly known as “bashes”, music concerts, and drama. There are also set times when the youth are given the opportunity to minister during a particular Sunday service. (On this Sunday, the youth are in charge of the service from the beginning to the end.) They lead the congregation in worship, usher, collect the offering, make prayers of intercession, read scriptures and even preach. This makes them feel appreciated and trusted. On such occasions, the youth see themselves as being given a religious space, a space that is not available to them in mainline churches (which tend to have gerontocratic structures that do not favour young people). The DCK, in contrast, designs programmes and creates institutions that explicitly attract and cater for the youth. Indeed, the DCK offers the younger generation much more than “soul food”; as a result, the youth forms both the bulk of the membership and acts as the pillars of the DCK’s ministries.

**Music and dance as ministry**

Music plays a central role in Pentecostal church services and worship, and is one of the ways in which Pentecostal Christians express their spirituality and theology. Music occupies a central place in the lives of Kenyan Pentecostal

---

<sup>38</sup> Oral Interview, J.B. Masinde, August 2006

Christians and, in fact, occupies a significant amount of time. The services in these churches are made up of three parts: the music, which includes praise and worship, the sermon and the offering service. Although the choir and soloist participate, the singing normally involves the entire congregation led by a choir or worship leader, backed by a team of instrumentalists. These services are exuberant and exhilarating. The songs, normally in English, sometimes in Kiswahili, do not require hymnbooks for the words are simple and repetitious, and one hymn can be repeated for up to twenty minutes. This music is not only current and in tune with what is going on globally on the world music scene, but is also a significant element in the whole experience. There is no doubt that the Pentecostal/charismatic style of worship is one of the main reasons why the DCK appeals to so many Kenyans, particularly the youth. The services are lively, refreshing and definitely geared to meet the needs of the modern Kenyan.

The style, tunes and fashion code in the church is also modern, trendy and the youth not only feel “at home”, but also have the feeling that they are understood, accepted and allowed to be themselves (i.e. “to be youth”). As we have said, there is also a very active youth wing and numerous social occasions that give young people the opportunity to be creative and to be entertained. There are special events that mix traditional gospel music with western and African music; there is gospel reggae, hip hop and rap – all of which are enjoyed and accepted in the DCK. This church, like other neo-Pentecostal churches, endeavours to help people forge a new identity, something that is extremely attractive to contemporary youth.

### **Deliverance Church of Kenya as a global network**

The DCK is not only a local church, but has grown to become a global and transnational phenomenon. This is not only true of the Deliverance Church alone, but other Kenyan Pentecostal churches as well. In fact, Kenyan Pentecostalism has made internationalism and globetrotting its “hallmark”. Globalism has become a prominent feature of Kenyan Pentecostalism, and implies that the new Pentecostal churches can and do transcend East African culture and boundaries. Today, these churches have established themselves throughout the African continent, and are to be found in Europe, America, Australia and Asia. Rijk van Dijk<sup>39</sup> asserts that the new type of Pentecostal churches have made internationalism their hallmark and that they have actively sought to enter other cultural contexts and have ascribed a place for themselves in these contexts through their thinking, organisation and claims

---

<sup>39</sup> Rijk Van Dijk, “Beyond the Rivers of Ethiopia: Pentecostal Pan-Africanism and Ghanaian Identities in the Transnational Domain”, in Wim Van Binsbergen and Rijk Van Dijk, (eds.), *Situating globality: African agency in the appropriation of global culture*, Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2004, 163.

of religious experience. To cite Van Dijk again, the claim is not simply that Kenya is “too small a place for our message”, but that entering other cultural contexts deepens, enriches and essentialises the religious experiences of Pentecostal communities.

Pentecostalism has therefore become a transnational phenomenon that in its modern form is reproduced in its local diversity through a highly accelerated circulation of goods, ideas and people. In fact it has formed a moral and physical geography whose domain is one of transnational cultural interpenetration and flow as created and re-created through travel and encounter.<sup>40</sup>

In Kenya, Pentecostal churches are adding terms such as “international”, “global” and “world” to their vocabulary of self-description. For example, the Deliverance Church in Nakuru is also called “Life Celebration Center International”.

The DCK has not only established itself throughout Kenya, but has also (as noted earlier) crossed borders to establish itself in South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique, the United Kingdom and the USA. Deliverance Church Mozambique is pastored by Pastor Dominic Ogonge, while Deliverance Church Vision International in Texas is pastored by Pastor Richard Mutai. Bishop Mark Kariuki, the general overseer of the church, frequently visits these congregations and the people manning the “ministries” in foreign lands are frequently invited home to preach the gospel to the locals. The DCK is therefore not only a local church, but also a global church, and its members include Diaspora Kenyans.

### **Conclusion**

In this article, we have attempted to analyse Kenyan Pentecostalism as an urban and modern phenomenon geared to meeting urban needs in rapidly modernising and globalising societies. We argued that these churches are led by upwardly mobile and educated professionals, who appropriate modern mass media technologies and marketing techniques to market their ministries, thus ushering in a modern type of evangelism. The Deliverance Church of Kenya is one of the largest Pentecostal churches in Kenya with a variety of ministries directed to addressing the challenges that Kenyans are facing in the urban areas in an era of globalisation and modernity. Pentecostalism provides a place of spiritual security and personal community to people who find Kenya’s rapid social change to be both unsettling and frightening.

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 163-189.

### Works consulted

- Adogame, A 2005. African Christian Communities in Diaspora, in Ogbu, U Kalu (ed.), *African Christianity: an African story*. Pretoria: University of Pretoria.
- Anderson, A 2005. New African Initiated Pentecostalism and Charismatics in South Africa. *Journal of Religion in Africa* 35(1). Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV.
- Anderson, A 2002. The globalization of Pentecostalism. Paper presented at the Churches' Commission on Mission, Annual Commission Meeting, Bangor, Wales.
- Cox, H 1996. *Fire from heaven: the rise of Pentecostal spirituality and the reshaping of religion in the twenty first century*. London: Chassell.
- Droogers, A. "Globalization and the Pentecostal," in *In the name of God lies, frauds, atrocities: "... the truth shall set you free"*. Available: [/www.davidicke.com/](http://www.davidicke.com/)..
- Gifford, P 2004. *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a globalising African Economy*. London: Hurst & Co.
- Gifford, P 1999. *African Christianity: its public role in Uganda and other African countries*. Kampala: Fountain.
- Hunt, SJ 2002. Deprivation and Western Pentecostalism revisited: the case of 'classical' Pentecostalism. *Pentecostal Studies* 1.
- Asamoah-Gyadu, K 2005. Born of water and the Spirit: Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity in Africa, in Ogbu U Kalu (eds.), *African Christianity: an African story*. Pretoria: University of Pretoria Press series 5. Vol (3).
- Ma, W 2005. Doing theology in the Philippines: a case of Pentecostal Christianity. *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 8(2), 215-233.
- Marshall, RF 1992. Pentecostalism in Southern Nigeria: an overview, in Paul Gifford (ed.), *New dimensions in African Christianity*, 7-32. Nairobi: Nairobi All Conference of Churches.
- Meyer, B 2004. Praise the Lord, popular cinema and Pentecostalite style in Ghana's public sphere. *American Ethnologist* 31(1), 92-110.
- Meyer, B 2004. Pentecostalism, culture on screen, magic and modernity in Ghana's new mediascape. Unpublished paper.
- Ndegwa, A 2007. Over 6,000 churches awaiting registration. *The Standard*, September 4<sup>th</sup>.
- Nyaundi, MN 2003. *Introduction to the study of religion*, Eldoret: Zapf Chancery Publishers.
- Olufunke, A. 2003/2004. Pentecostal challenges in Africa and Latin America: a comparative focus on Nigeria and Brazil. *CODESRIA: Afrika Zamani*, 11 & 12, 136-159.

- Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life*; Pentecostalism in Kenya, <http://pewforum.org/survey/pentecostal/countries/print.php?country> <http://statement.bahai.org/94-0824.html>.
- Shorter, A. & Njiru, J. 2001. *New religious movements in Africa*. Nairobi: Pauline.
- Smith, G 2006. Evangelical Christianity Sweeps Through Kenya as Conservative Christianity floods Africa. Available: <http://www.wwrn.org/article.php?idd=23258=20&cont=3>.
- Togarasei, L 2006. Modern Pentecostalism as an urban phenomenon: the case of the Family of God Church in Zimbabwe. *Exchange* 34 (4), 349-375.
- Rijk Van Dijk 2004. Beyond the rivers of Ethiopia: Pentecostal Pan-Africanism and Ghanaian identities in the Transnational domain, in Wim van Binsbergen & Rijk
- Van Dijk (eds.), *Situating globality: African agency in the appropriation of global culture*, 163-189. Leiden & Boston: Brill.
- Wolfe, J 2002. Evangelicals and Pentecostals: indigenizing a global Gospel, in John Wolfe (ed.), *Global religious movements in regional context*. Ashgate: The Open University Press.

*Interviews*

- Bishop Mark Kariuki, August, 2006.  
Bishop J.B. Masinde, August 2006.

