

Pneumatiphobia and Pentecostalism among the Yoruba Christians in Nigeria

Benjamin Isola Akano

ABSTRACT

When the Western missionaries established the Christian faith in Nigeria's southwest in the nineteenth century, it was not easy to engage the heavily spiritualised cosmologies of the Yoruba people. Eventually, Pentecostalism brought a breakthrough to the complex spiritual realities they encountered. However, its expression is not without some unbiblical baggage of some parts of the African worldview as they respond to these existential realities. These undesired baggage include pneumatiphobia, an extreme fear of the spirits, as a driving force for Pentecostal-like manifestations. Therefore, this study examined pneumatiphobia and Pentecostalism among the Yoruba Christians in Nigeria. The descriptive study surveyed some Pentecostal prayer practices, using participant observation of events on selected 'Prayer Mountains,' interviews of twenty-five visitors, ten leaders of 'Prayer Mountains,' and ten others. The study revealed that some Pentecostal-like expressions, including energetic prayers and ecstasy, were motivated by fear of the malevolent spirits in the people's worldview. Also, there is a strong attachment to the spirits of the ancestors, and some invoke the 'God of their leaders' rather than praying directly to God, assuming it will hasten answers to prayers. More so, it has reduced Christianity to a 'selfie' faith and a mere tool for solving personal problems. Thus, the writer argued for an overhauling of the current engagement approaches of Yoruba cosmologies and shifting to a more authentic biblical perspective so that the church can be the agent of holistic transformation and God's glory on earth.

Keywords: Christians, Nigeria, Pentecostalism, pneumatiphobia, Prayer Mountain, Yoruba

INTRODUCTION

In 2023, I attended a two-hour revival service of an evangelical gathering in Nigeria's southwest, where Yoruba people are the majority. Though the organizer expected that a bible-based extemporaneous preaching of about thirty to forty minutes would lead to another forty minutes of intense and energetic praying, it ended up that the revival preacher only sparsely flash-read the assigned Bible text without any exposition or application. What followed was a series of fear-instilling, terrifying stories of calamities that had befallen people, Christians included. The response was a spontaneous session of passionate, vigorous, and energetic prayers, including people going into ecstasy. The phenomenon continued as the preacher

interspersed his ministration with more emotion-moving stories that led to renewed frenzy displays in prayer.

The spontaneous and simultaneous prayers experienced were typical of Pentecostals, especially the indigenous ones. African Pentecostalism takes Bible passages like Acts 2:2 and 4:31 more seriously and literally, priding in emotional vis-à-vis physical display in prayer. It may have emerged from their experiences in traditional religions and contrasts sharply with the prayer tradition most mainline evangelicals inherited from their mother mission agencies, where prayer is either read or said solemnly by an individual. In contrast, the others respond with 'Amen,' intermittently or at the end of the prayer. However, a critical factor that enhanced the frenzied atmosphere was the fear instilled by the stories presented as reported by the revival preacher. The calamities reported in all the stories were associated with the malevolent spirits and their human agents on earth. Thus, the preacher leveraged this pneumatiphobic tendency to advocate invoking Pentecostal power for victory. This is a common phenomenon in 'Prayer Mountains,' and it has often led to an overdependence on the reality of people's pneumatiphobic experiences and the neglect of authentic biblical motivation and faith.

Therefore, this paper examines how an extreme fear of spirits, a carry-over from the traditional African worldview, has often influenced the Pentecostal prayer practices among the indigenous Yoruba Christians of southwest Nigeria. In this research, Pentecostalism refers to all strands, including charismatic manifestations across denominations. The research is descriptive, and the researcher employed a qualitative means to survey some indigenous Pentecostal prayer practices on ten (10) 'Prayer Mountains,' interviewing twenty-five (25) regular visitors, seven (7) Prayer Mountain prophets, and five (5) other Christians on the subject of pneumatiphobia and Pentecostalism. The research agrees that while some spiritual experiences are real, some are fear-instilled and that some contemporary Pentecostal approaches to engaging the Yoruba spiritual cosmology need an overhauling and replacement with more authentic biblical approaches.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews the literature to explicate pneumatiphobia and Pentecostalism among the Yoruba Christians in Nigeria. Areas covered include the fundamental spiritual realities in Yoruba

religious worldview, Pentecostal Christianity in Yorubaland, and pneumatophobia in Yoruba Christian Pentecostalism.

Fundamental Spiritual Realities in Yoruba Religious Worldview

Yoruba people in Nigeria are in the southwestern states of Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ogun, Lagos, and Ekiti states and speak various dialects.¹ There are also Yoruba people in the neighbouring states of Kwara and Kogi to the north, Edo to the south, and Benin Republic to the West. According to Toyin Falola, though they have different ethnic subgroups like Oyo, Ijebu, Ijesa, Ekiti, Egba, and Igbomina, they take advantage of their collective identity, especially for nationalistic prestige.² They are “a collection of diverse people bound together by a common language, history, and culture. . . . Yoruba mythology holds that all Yoruba people descended from a hero called Oduduwa.”³ Olakunle Folami, Taiwo Olaiya, and Adebajji Akintoye affirm the historical acceptance of Ile-Ife as the cradle of the Yoruba and the ‘source of civilisation’.⁴ Some archaeological findings show them to be one of the oldest peoples found in the tropical forests of West Africa.⁵ They see themselves as people originating from one person, Oduduwa, and a place, Ife.

Scholars like John Olopade and Samel Kunhiyop agree with John Mbiti’s assertion that “the spiritual world of African peoples is very densely populated with spiritual beings, spirits and the living-dead.”⁶ This assertion is more real among the Yoruba than many other cultures. Yoruba people are a single African people with the largest collection of divinities – 1,700. These divinities, called *òrìṣà*, are categories of spiritual beings regarded as God’s associates with *Òrìṣà-nlá*, or Supreme divinity, as God’s earthly deputy.⁷ Kunhiyop further states that the Yoruba people believe that the full responsibility of all affairs belongs to the Supreme Deity, while humans only follow their orders through priests and diviners.⁸ This is a reason for their firm belief in destiny that only the Supreme Being can unravel its mystery. Since God

is immanent, these lesser spiritual entities, namely, divinities, spirits and ancestors, are His personalised representation that they can relate to in daily affairs.⁹

Yoruba believe that there are different forms of spirits – whether those created or those who turned so after death. They also believe animals, rivers, and other natural entities have spirits. Though invisible, they may make themselves visible to human beings.¹⁰ This is one of the reasons those who engage in farming, hunting, or other forest or river-related vocations need ‘spiritual fortification.’ Kunhiyop adds that spirits are either benevolent or malevolent, and their activities make Africans generally hold to a dualistic theodicy, believing that good comes from God and evil comes from malevolent spirits or evil people through witchcraft, sorcery, and other magic powers.¹¹

Two essential paradoxes make Yoruba spiritualized cosmologies relevant to this research. First, though spirits are more powerful than humans, making humans fear them, they can be manipulated for evil and personal advantage.¹² The religious officials or leaders conduct various ceremonies, rituals, and other specialised activities to do this. They are supposedly trained and have good knowledge of the religion. Consequently, they are often respected by the religious community. The second paradox is that, though these spirits are powerful but not as omnipotent as God, they may still oppose God’s will in their activities. This is one of the reasons humans seek the assistance of other spirits, particularly the benevolent spirits, to counter the activities of these malevolent spirits. This also points to why there are good and bad magic powers.

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1. Peter Ropo Awoniyi, “Yoruba Cultural Approach to Justice and Peace and Its Influence on the Church in the Southwest Nigeria” *Ogbomosho Journal of Theology* XIX (2), 2014: 1-2. 1-10.

2. Toyin Falola, “Atlantic Yoruba and the Expanding Frontiers of Yoruba Culture and Politics” *J.F. Odunjo Lecture* (Ibadan: University of Ibadan, 2012), 17.

3. “Yoruba” Countries and their Cultures. Retrieved from <https://www.everyculture.com/wc/Mauritania-to-Nigeria/Yoruba.html> <October 12, 2019>.

4. Olakunle Michael Folami & Taiwo Akanbi Olaiya, “Gender, Storytelling and Peace Construction in a Divided Society: A Case Study of Ife/Modakeke Conflict” *Cogent Social Sciences*, Vol. 2 (2016): 4. DOI: 10.1080/23311886.2016.1159015; S. Adebajji Akintoye, *A History of the Yoruba People* (Dakar: Amalion Publishing, 2014), 18.

5. Akintoye, 19.

6. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1982), 75; John A. Olopade, *Introduction to World Religions* (Osogbo: Oluwatoyin Publishers, 2018), 63.

7. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 76.

8. Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics* (Kaduna: Baraka Press & Publishers Ltd, 2004), 16.

9. Kunhiyop, 16.

10. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 78, 79.

11. Kunhiyop, 17, 18.

12. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 79, 80.

humans fear them, they can be manipulated for evil and personal advantage.¹³ The religious officials or leaders conduct various ceremonies, rituals, and other specialised activities to do this. They are supposedly trained and have good knowledge of the religion. Consequently, they are often respected by the religious community.¹⁴ The second paradox is that, though these spirits are powerful but not as omnipotent as God, they may still oppose God's will in their activities.¹⁵ This is one of the reasons humans seek the assistance of other spirits, particularly the benevolent spirits, to counter the activities of these malevolent spirits. This also points to why there are good and bad magic powers.

The category of the 'living-dead' refers to the departed of up to five generations who have been considered the guardians of the family heritage and ethos. They are often regarded as the best of their intermediaries with God because they understand the situations of the living since they had been there before their departure.¹⁶ A freshly departed soul is assumed to be roaming within the vicinity of their abode. This may be one of the reasons the living pour libation to ensure they do not offend the living dead. Thus, while the living desires the intermediary roles of the living dead, they also fear them because they may want to inflict punishment on those who violate the ethos of the family or clan. Kunhiyop affirms that the ancestors may appear to their descendants through dreams or visions to share information, including instructing them on steps to take in different situations.¹⁷ It is common to hear people speak of their grandparents or parents appearing to them in dreams to instruct them on preparing some portions of herbal concoctions to heal a terrible sickness or what incantation to use to overcome some spells. Because of these benefits, they do not want to offend the living dead as doing so may lead to punishment such as misfortunes, barrenness, war, and sicknesses, among others.¹⁸ Till date, some Yoruba look forward to their parents appearing to them in dreams.

From the foregoing, the Yoruba people are self-conscious of spirits, deities, gods, or ancestors in every aspect of their lives, including diet and dressing. Kunhiyop affirms that religion, as a function of beliefs in God and other spiritual entities among the Yoruba, defines their ethical values. This is the reason for their being incurably religious.¹⁹ These values often serve as bases for taboos in Yorubaland. For instance, the Òrìṣà-nlá worshippers do not eat snails; worshippers of Èṣù, the trickster deity, will not eat fried maise,

while the worshippers of Ògún, the deity of iron, will not eat roasted yam.²⁰ As Fatou Diop and Dwight Merunka rightly put it, some African traditional attires are attached to religious identity, ethnicity, and nationality and religious-spiritual meanings, benefits, instrumental values, or end goals motivate them toward such identity.²¹ Bukola Oyeyi avers that some colours are meant for the devotees seeking favour from the deity, illustrating that "the red colour . . . implied certain spiritual state for Şàngó and Ògún worshippers. White, so also water, was important to Òṣun worshippers. They complement the use of water with the use of a white dress. Both relate to the virtue of colour and the spiritual quality of water."²² Thus, the Yoruba people are conscious of the various spiritual personalities in all they do, whether directly religious or non-religious. Hence, there is no sacred-secular dichotomy of any sort.

These cognitive orientations about the spirits often affect the day-to-day way of responding to situations that come their way. For instance, walking into cobwebs is not ordinary, particularly if it becomes a repeated experience, even if it is due to some obvious uncleanness or abandonment of the route. They attach some spiritual connotations to such an experience. Similarly, stepping out or entering one's house may not be done anyhow: a particular leg must go out first or step in. These all dictate how they respond to issues. They believe that a malevolent spirit causes problems, and sometimes, they carry such traditional African perceptions over into the Christian faith.

Pentecostal Christianity in Yorubaland

Scholars agree that the nineteenth-century efforts of the Western missionaries yielded an outstanding result that led to a firm establishment of Christianity in most parts of Africa.²³ Though Adrian Hastings was concerned that the impact did not include the whole of Christian life, he had affirmed that the missionary works of the mission churches had spread considerably and became known across most of the continent.²⁴ Notable coverage areas include southwest Nigeria, where the Yoruba people form a major ethnic group. However, engaging the heavily spiritualised cosmology they encountered among the Yoruba

20. Bolanle WAHAB, "African Traditional Religions, Environmental Health and Sanitation in Rural Communities" *The Environment*, Vol 1, No. 1 (April 2004): 1-9, 3.

21. Fatou Diop and Dwight Merunka, "African Tradition and Global Consumer Culture: Understanding Attachment to Traditional Dress Style in West Africa," *International Business Research*, Vol. 6, No. 11 (2013): 1-14. 2, 7, 8, 12. doi: 10.5539/ibr.v6n11p1.

22. Bukola Adeyemi Oyeyi, *Dress and Identity in Yorubaland, 1880-1980* (Leiden: Leiden University Repository, 2012), 162-163.

23. Matthews A. Ojo, "An Overview of the History of Neo-Pentecostalism in Nigeria," in *The Abandoned Gospel: Confronting Neo-Pentecostalism and the Prosperity Gospel in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Eds. Philip W. Barnes, Bazil Bhasera, Matthews A. Ojo, Jack Rantho, Trevor Yoakum, and Misheck Zulu, 13-27 (AB-316, 2021), 14.

24. Adrian Hastings' *A History of African Christianity, 1950-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 67.

13. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 79, 80.

14. John S. Mbiti, *African Religion* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 2015), 11-12.

15. Kunhiyop, 17, 18.

16. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 83. This seemingly has a Christological resonance based on the message of Hebrews 2:14-18.

17. Kunhiyop, 19, 20.

18. Kunhiyop, 20.

19. Kunhiyop, 13.

people was difficult.

Historically, the African Indigenous Churches, African Initiated Churches or African Instituted Churches emerged out of the need to deal with issues pertinent to African people's experience, which theologies of the Western missionaries did not practically handle.²⁵ There was a great concern that the White missionaries did not do well in incarnating Christian practices into the local cultural milieu.²⁶ Therefore, African emphasis on spirituality, especially prayer, for solving all existential problems of man was to reflect the African factor in the church's mission in Africa. As earlier stated, they took the events of the Church in Acts literally, expecting all true Pentecostals to manifest those practices, irrespective of their existential challenges. This is noticeable in Nigeria, particularly among the Yoruba people.

Though the indigenous churches movement may be traceable to 1817 schisms and secessions from Methodist missions in Sierra Leone, which spread rapidly but independently across South Africa, Congo-Kinshasa and Nigeria, Omoyajowo notes that the schism is not a result of anti-West or anti-European attitude.²⁷ As far as the intentions of the people are concerned, they are Christo-centric movements aimed at making the Christian faith provide answers to all life's problems. Examples include the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), Cherubim and Seraphim Movement (C&S), the Church of the Lord (Aladura) and the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC).²⁸ Notably, these foremost examples are all from southwest Nigeria among the Yoruba people. Thus, going by Ikem et al.'s assertion that Nigeria is the leading frontier of the Pentecostal explosion in Africa, the southwest was critical to this reality that has three phases: first, a blend between foreign and indigenous Pentecostalism (1930s to 1960); second, interdenominational campus fellowships (1970s to 1980s); and third, a shift from traditional or classic Pentecostalism to neo-Pentecostalism (1990s till date).²⁹ These phases have areas of similarity, including associating most problems to spiritual roots to which prayer is the primary response.

Ojo asserts that "beginning from the early 1970s, a new form of Christianity emerged with the rise of

25. Deji Isaac Ayegboyin, "Aladura Spirituality: Authentic African Initiative in Christian Missions" *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology*, Vol. XVI, No. 1 (2011): 166. Ayegboyin, "Aladura Spirituality: Authentic African Initiative in Christian Missions," 166.

26. Michael Ogunewu & Deji Ayegboyin, "Moses Orimolade Tunolase, Joseph Ayodele Babalola, Josiah Olunowo Oshitelu, and Samuel Bilewu Joseph Oschoffa: Four Trailblazers of the Aladura Movement in Nigeria" *Journal of African Christian Biography*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (April 2017), 6.

27. Ayegboyin, "Aladura Spirituality: Authentic African Initiative in Christian Missions," 166; J. Akinyele Omoyajowo, *Cherubim and Seraphim: the History of African Independent Church* (Lagos: NOK Publishers International, 1982), xiv.

28. David B. Barrett, "African Initiated Church Movement:" 43-44. In A. Scott Moreau (Ed.), *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 43.

29. Afamekune Patrick Ikem, Confidence N. Ogbonna & Olu-sola Ogunnubi, "Pentecostalism, Electoral Prophetism and National Security Challenges in Nigeria," *African Security* 2020: 3-7. DOI: 10.1080/19392206.2020.1731111.

Pentecostal and Charismatic movements."³⁰ Their emphases include radical conversion experiences like Saul's, baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues, literal interpretation of the Bible, healing and miraculous manifestations, and exercise of power over all demonic manifestations.³¹ However, these features seem to combine indigenous and imported cosmological worldviews. While their outlook reveals Westernised articulation, "their basic religious cosmology is rooted in the African worldviews of spirits, evil, and fear of the present and the future. Moreover, their social goal is congruent with the general aspirations of African traditional quest for long life, money, power, success and fame in a competitive but dislocated society."³² In practice, three strands of Pentecostalism present in Nigeria have blending impacts on one another, making distinguishing them impossible.³³ For instance, they all have this pneumatophobic tendency as a means of retaining their members and attracting non-members.

Thus, some features of imported Western Pentecostalism, imparted Western Pentecostalism, and Pentecostalism independent of the West have mingled. A keen observer of Christian practices among the Yoruba people would agree that it is difficult today to use prayer programmes to categorise churches into Roman Catholic, Mainline Protestants, African Indigenous, or Independent Pentecostals, as it used to be. One other useful digression is that even Muslim groups are venturing into some forms of Pentecostal-like prayer practices because they want to retain members and attract non-members.³⁴ Then, one may infer that 'Pentecostalism' is no longer as conceived in Acts 2 or as re-encountered in the Asuza 1906, but a tool for responding to fear of anything with spiritual connotation. This is pneumatophobia.

Pneumatophobia in Yoruba Christian Pentecostalism

Pneumatophobia refers to an extreme fear of spirits. Its causes range from genetic to environmental factors.³⁵ Environmental factors include the socialisation process that makes people view spirits

30. Ojo, "An Overview of the History of Neo-Pentecostalism in Nigeria," 15.

31. Ojo, "An Overview of the History of Neo-Pentecostalism in Nigeria," 15.

32. Ojo, Matthews A. (2018) "Pentecostalism and Charismatic Movements in Nigeria: Factors of Growth and Inherent Challenges," *The WATS Journal: An Online Journal from West Africa Theological Seminary*. Vol. 3, No. 1, Article 5: 76 (74-94). <https://place.asbury-seminary.edu/watsjournal/vol3/iss1/>.

33. Benjamin Akano "Mentoring as an Effective Strategy for Leadership Development in Contemporary African Pentecostalism" *Pentecostalism, Charismaticism and Neo-Prophetic Movements Journal* Volume 3 Issue 2 (July 2022): 23-33. Available online at: <https://noyam.org/journals/pecanep/>.

34. M. Janson, "Crossing Borders: The Case of NASFAT or 'Pentecostal Islam' in Southwest Nigeria," *Social Anthropology* 28 (2), (2020): 418-433. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-8676.12769>. The social media also has a number of such 'Pentecostal' manifestations: "Female Muslim Cleric Conducting Deliverance," September 25, 2021. <https://fb.watch/sxm3hN74ey/>. Accessed June 6, 2024; "Muslim Cleric Spotted Performing Deliverance inside Mosque," March 11, 2023. <https://fb.watch/sxmEtbOm37/>. Accessed June 6, 2024.

35. "Pneumatophobia (Fear of Spirits)" *Psych Times*. <https://www.psychtimes.com>. Accessed April 9, 2024.

in a particular light. As with other phobias, it causes significant distress and affects the way people live their lives.³⁶ The Yoruba spiritual cosmology is complex. The whole psychic atmosphere of the African setting, especially the villages, is filled with the reality of mystic powers.³⁷ Notably, most of the experiences of Africans may appear as mere fiction to outsiders. Nevertheless, they are a source of worry for those who went through the experience. For instance, I met Boti, an okada rider (a commercial motorcycle used for transport in parts of Nigeria) in a Yoruba city. He narrated how he transported a man to an agreed destination one night, only to realise that the man was a 'living dead,' as he began to shiver for cold after being paid the agreed fare. He had to stop his business abruptly that night. Though Boti is a pseudonym, his story is an authentic life experience that, though difficult to prove, other Yoruba can associate with it.

Some have narrated that they felt swollen/heavy heads after buying wares in some local night markets. They often concluded the strange experience could only be with a perceived 'living dead' or other spirits' wearing' human body temporarily. These are just some of the different experiences in Yoruba spiritual cosmology. While man is destined to die once and face God's judgment (Heb. 9:27), one must provide more than an ivory tower theology of this reality. They want a practical theology that speaks to this situation more practically. They attribute every strange occurrence that is beyond their understanding to spirituality. For instance, they do not know how to explain the rising of a fallen tree after 24 hours except by spiritual connotation.³⁸ People have also reported that they found some household utensils after some big trees were cut down, showing that some activities were happening inside such trees. Such activities go beyond what humans can explain. This is also true of any illness or disease that defies medical solutions. It is often associated with some spiritual forces. While the Pentecostal Christian faith seems to respond to this reality more practically, its contemporary approach has some unbiblical elements that become a source of concern.

According to Osadolor Imasogie:

The atmosphere is usually pervaded by fear of a possible inadvertently provoked anger of the divinity as well as the possible harmful consequences of the evil intention of diabolical fellow worshipers who may want to experiment with their newly acquired magical powers. . . . The main emphasis is on propitiation to avert calamities because, in the African worldview, man is constantly at war with the evil spiritual forces as manifested in witchcraft and magical power as

36. Manchester Hypnotherapy & Counselling, "Treatment of Phobia." <https://www.manchester-hypnotherapy.com>. Accessed April 8, 2024.

37. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 197.

38. Sola Isola, "How 100-yr-old tree fell, rose again in 24hours," *Vanguard* October 14, 2021. <https://www.vanguardngr.com>. Access June 6, 2024.

*wielded by fellow human beings.*³⁹

He adds that the evil forces may cause evil in people after being bribed by enemies or when the spirits are driven by hunger. This may be why a typical Yoruba prayer for travellers would be that they would not travel 'on the day the road is hungry.' By implication, there is a spirit behind the physical road, which, if hungry, will demand the flesh of those travelling on it.

Both Matthews Ojo and Scott MacDonald agree that the African strand of Pentecostalism incorporates and accommodates traditional African worldviews that are not necessarily biblical. Ojo explains that:

*Despite their modern outlook, African Pentecostalism is steeped in primal worldviews that have been made elastic to accommodate essential questions about life, whether in its traditional moorings or in its modern perspectives. Hence, with their emphases on demonic oppression, spiritual warfare, and healing and deliverance activities, it is evident that Neo-Pentecostals continue to grapple with power in its various manifestations.*⁴⁰

MacDonald affirms that their music and prayer often set a theme that shows that "Christians are at war with spiritual forces, and our tumultuous services revolve around that conflict through declarations and exorcisms."⁴¹ This is simply because, as hostile spiritual forces, demons bear the primary blame for human sufferings and calamities. Hence, African Pentecostalism is more concerned with spiritual warfare than praying for lost souls.

Further, Conrad Mbewe asserts that Africans have been made to believe that some humans associate with spiritual forces to bring about curses that lead to illnesses and afflictions. In some cases, they are spirits of the ancestors who have been wronged by the living, wrongly or rightly. Thus, they often cause barrenness, infertility, and other misfortunes. Sometimes, they are generational curses due to what ancestors have done wrongly.⁴² This agrees with Mbiti's assertion that they fear magic, sorcery and witchcraft. Two major types of magic may motivate people to pray passionately. These are contagious and homoeopathic magic. In contagious magic, people hurt individuals by pricking objects belonging to them. This is one of the reasons people do not want to leave their hair, nails, clothes, or other objects they suspect may be used against them. Some Pentecostals are always careful not to

39. The Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary Ogbomoso, *A Voice of Conscience: Selected Speeches of Rev Prof Osadolor Imasogie* (Ogbomoso: Kingdom Impact Publishing and Media Ltd, 2022), 133-134.

40. Ojo, "An Overview of the History of Neo-Pentecostalism in Nigeria," 25.

41. Scott MacDonald, "Spiritual Powers," in *The Abandoned Gospel: Confronting Neo-Pentecostalism and the Prosperity Gospel in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Eds. Philip W. Barnes, Basil Bhasera, Matthews A. Ojo, Jack Rantho, Trevor Yoakum, and Misheck Zulu, 53-62 (AB-316, 2021), 54.

42. Conrad Mbewe, "Illnesses, Curses, and Afflictions," in *The Abandoned Gospel: Confronting Neo-Pentecostalism and the Prosperity Gospel in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Eds. Philip W. Barnes, Basil Bhasera, Matthews A. Ojo, Jack Rantho, Trevor Yoakum, and Misheck Zulu, 75-83 (AB-316, 2021), 76,77.

leave any of their items that may be used against them. In homoeopathic magic, they hurt individuals by pricking the representation of what looks like the person. These include a mirror image and a wooden doll.⁴³

These experiences often push Yoruba people to seek higher powers to control the powers working against them. For the Christians among them who still have such fear, the way out is the Pentecostal power. Hence, it helps them get involved in spiritual warfare programs in prayer houses, prayer mountains, or prayer camps. The goals are related to dealing with the powers that want to manipulate them. In other cases, 'deliverance ministers' have asked adult Christians to travel hundreds of kilometres to their village of origin, ask for the location where their placentas are buried, exhume them and 'destroy' whatever contagious magic that may be associated with them. Some pastors have asked their members to 'cover' themselves with the blood of Jesus to prevent every form of homoeopathic magic that may be targeted at them.

Often, when there is a snake bite or a scorpion sting, the first place to look at is not the physical reason that may have attracted the scorpion or snake to where the people are, especially in the house. Such occurrences are often associated with sorcery, believing that an enemy may have sent such harmful creatures from the spirit realm.⁴⁴ A familiar prayer song in this regard is:

Evil arrow: go back to the sender

Evil arrow: go back to the sender

The idea in the prayer song that they often sing with vigour is that everyone always has one human enemy somewhere who may be sending some 'evil arrows' of sorcery representing such snake bites, scorpion stings, or other calamities, including misfortunes, sicknesses, sorrow, and other mystical experiences.⁴⁵

Thus, it is agreeable that the formation of indigenous Pentecostalism was vital to the growth of Christianity in 20th-century Africa because of its response to their fears and other existential challenges, as opined by some scholars.⁴⁶ However, one cannot but agree with Joel Mokhoathi that its practices have a high tendency of undesired syncretism.⁴⁷ The implication is that Christians must subject every attempt at contextualisation to critical examination. As shown by the findings in this research, the argument is that some Pentecostal manifestations of some churches,

particularly on Prayer Mountains, in Yorubaland, reflect syncretic patterns that contradict the biblical standard.

METHODOLOGY

This research used descriptive design to elucidate pneumatophobia and Pentecostalism among the Yoruba Christians in Nigeria. It employed a qualitative means to survey some indigenous Pentecostal prayer practices on ten (10) 'Prayer Mountains.' Apart from observation of the practices, the researcher used research assistants to interview twenty (25) regular visitors to Prayer Mountains, ten (10) leaders, ministers, or prophets of the visited locations, and five (5) other Christians. Issues of concern ranged from what led the visitors to the Prayer Mountains, their belief in ancestors, their salvation experience, and testimonies about those Prayer Mountains. On the part of the ministers on those Prayer Mountains, the focus includes operations of the Prayer Mountains, statistics of people visiting their Mountains, reasons for their visits, their links with fathers of faith, and general testimonies of the Mountains.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

A 'Prayer Mountain' (called Ori Oke in Yoruba, meaning a hilltop or mountain top) is a place of solitary worship and prayer, usually established for Christians and those who have confidence in the Christian God. Such a place is often free from interruption and obstruction so that the seeker of God may not be distracted while sorting out critical spiritual issues. While this concept has different connotations, keen observers of the practices on Prayer Mountains agree that its etymology implies 'destiny at the top'. Some understand it to be a place that is geographically closer to heaven, the abode of God, and that the Spirit of God resides permanently on the Mountains.⁴⁸ Though the contemporary Prayer Mountain phenomenon cuts across different churches and denominations in Yorubaland, it originated with the indigenous churches like the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), Cherubim and Seraphim Movement (C&S), Church of the Lord (Aladura), and Celestial Church of Christ (CCC).⁴⁹ They usually appoint resident pastors, prophets, and prophetess to oversee the affairs of the place and render spiritual assistance to its visitors.⁵⁰

The founders of Prayer Mountains trace their beliefs to the Bible. The first group traces their establishment to Moses' encounter on Mount Sinai in Exodus 3:4, 19, 20. A second group associates the prayer mountain

48. Akiti Glory Alamu, "The Do's and Don'ts: A Theological Inquiry into the Kpim of Ori Oke in Ilorin Metropolis," *Stellenbosch Theological Journal*, Vol. 6 No. 1 (2020). <https://www.scielo.org/DOI:10.17570/stj.2020.v6n1.a13>.

49. Alamu, <https://www.scielo.org>.

50. Deji Ayegboyan & Solomon A. Ishola, *African Indigenous Churches: A Historical Perspective* (Lagos: Greater Height Publications, 1999), 78-79.

43. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 200.

44. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 200.

45. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 200.

46. Ezekiel O. Ajani, "Leadership Dynamics and the Trans-Nationalisation of Nigeria Pentecostal Missions." *Ogbomosho Journal of Theology*, vol. XIII, no. 1, 2008: 154; B. I. Akano, "Mentoring as an Effective Strategy for Leadership Development in Contemporary African Pentecostalism." *Pentecostalism, Charismaticism and Neo-Prophetic Movements Journal* (PECANEP), Vol. 3, Issue 2 - July, 2022: 23; Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 232-234.

47. Joel Mokhoathi, Abstract of "From Contextual Theology to African Christianity: The Consideration of Adiaphora from a South African Perspective" *Religions*, Vol. 8, No. 266 (2017): 1. DOI: 10.3390/rel8120266.

phenomenon with Jesus' experience in Matthew 17:1-5. A further establishment of the phenomenon came through the great revival of Apostle Ayo Babalola in 1930.⁵¹ However, a contemporary Prayer Mountain is conceptual rather than geophysical. Observably, while it is often desired to be located on a mountain, hill, rocks, or other elevated platforms, some gospel ministers declare a selected campground, retreat centre, or even a church auditorium as Prayer Mountains as long as they converge regularly for prayer programmes other than the regular worship services.

Modes of Operation on Prayer Mountains

Personal observation shows that most prayer mountains operate similarly. First, there are specific times when visitors gather in a hall or any designated point for corporate devotion in the morning, evening, or both. Second, they allow each to go to different parts of the mountain for personal prayers. Third, they have specific programmes monthly and quarterly, and 'as the Spirit leads,' when they invite 'heavily anointed prophets' to minister to the spiritual needs of the people. Some visitors' target is when such renowned prophets visit to cause a 'Bethesda' kind of stir (John 5:4). This researcher's observations and confirmation from the visitors and ministers of the Prayer Mountains show that attendance ranges from a ten to a few hundred, depending on how long a Mountain has been established and the kinds of testimonies from the place.

On assurance, findings revealed that what draws the majority of the visitors to the Prayer Mountains is their belief that prophets generally, and particularly those located on mountains, have special anointing to deal with spirits. One of the prophets noted that the physical altitude of the mountain has a spiritual implication of placing an individual above their enemies. Therefore, they are so committed to their prophets and can follow them to any 'Mountains' as they seek solutions to their life challenges. They stated further that some have been drawn to specific mountains because of others' testimonies as they battle their life challenges. One of the prophets stated that a 25-year-old young man who was struck with the 'spirit of madness' is now healed while a baby of six who was concluded to go for surgery did not need to go for surgery because she experienced healing. Some reveal that Prophets and Apostles are more anointed for miracles, signs, wonders, and deliverance than the pastors. This may be a reason the ministers go by the title of Prophet and Apostle.

Perception on Source of Problems

People visit Prayer Mountains for different problems, including diseases, medical conditions, emotional and psycho-social disorders, medical conditions, poverty, lack of marriage suitor, joblessness, and lack of promotion. Most of the visitors

interviewed assert that the sources of their problems are spiritual. Some refer to the problems as arrows or attacks from the enemies of their destinies. They also feel that some of their enemies are from their extended families. One of them expressly affirmed that the spiritual arrow from his extended family created a problem in his marriage that made him visit the prayer mountain for the first time. Like other visitors, he noted that he had often associated every problem with a 'spirit.'

The views of the majority of the interviewed visitors are built on Yoruba understanding of the world as a battlefield. According to a woman, her life problems are a function of spiritual forces of darkness, or malevolent spirits, that battle her God-given destiny. Sometimes, they see the Prayer Mountains as places of refuge from where to seek cover from the arrows of the wicked spirits. Some Christians who do not visit Prayer Mountains state that some of the visitors they know believe that the spiritual source of their problems is in their family. So, they often keep away from members of their family.

Beliefs and Perceptions about Ancestors

Findings also discovered that they revere some past and present Christian leaders whose ministries have been associated with power manifestations. These heroes of faith are majorly ministers from the African Indigenous Churches (AICs). The prominent ones whose names cut across these churches, irrespective of denominational lines, include Joseph Ayo Babalola of Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), Enoch Adeboye of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Samuel Oshoffa of the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC), and Moses Orimolade of the Cherubim and Seraphim Movement (C & S). For instance, they refer to God as 'Olorun Ayo Babalola,' meaning 'God of Ayo Babalola.' They believe their anointing is still 'alive' to attract miraculous solutions to their problems. This sounds like the concept of living dead in African understanding. These names were not limited to the denomination or church that a hero belongs. Adeboye's or Babalola's names are heard in a C & S mountain, though they belong to RCCG and CAC, respectively. Some even say they combine the 'anointing' and 'calling' of these heroes of faith to claim their right from God.

Other Issues

One of the common ideas among AICs is the use of 'faith objects' like water, oil, and fruits. Prophets has asked some to sprinkle 'sacred water' upon a person or location where the activities of the spirits are suspected. In some mountains, to not have water for special prayer is to be incomplete. Assuredly, people bought prayer-customised bottled water that should cost fifty naira at one thousand. Sometimes, visitors to Prayer Mountains have been asked to bring a photograph or other items of the loved ones they are praying for because such individuals are

⁵¹. Alamu, <https://www.scielo.org>.

not around. This is patterned after the traditional African contagious or homoeopathic magic. When the clients were asked to bring fruits, like bananas, apples, oranges and coconuts, the prophet said the fruit would serve as a form of 'sacrifice' to appease the spirits troubling their clients so they could leave the host alone. The researcher has seen cases where people from the AICs have placed assorted fruits by the streamside. Others do not attach any importance or meaning to such fruits.

Another issue of concern is a low emphasis on the salvation experience. This is obvious in most of the sessions attended because some prophets believe they have been sent to all oppressed people, irrespective of their religious backgrounds and orientation towards Christ. Some individuals attested that a prophetess told them her mandate was not to tell people to leave their religion but to tell them to be morally upright and deliver them from their problems. Their emphasis is on the problem and the enemies that brought the problems. In most cases, they do not even probe the clients' roles in their problems.

Also, most regular visitors often idolise the prophets, and they tend to believe the words of the prophets more than the Bible because their prayers and prophetic declarations often come to pass quickly. Some of them are even ignorant of God's Word concerning their situations. Some interviewees stated that some have returned home with more problems than what took them to the mountains because they do not handle them holistically. I know some people who went to Prayer Mountains for what later turned out to be medical cases, which had got worse by the time they eventually went for medical attention. Another prominent issue raised is that some self-inflicted character problems have often been associated with 'spirits.' For instance, instead of looking for biblical steps to overcoming emotional problems like envy, anger, and lust, they only look for a spiritual solution on the mountains, praying 'all manners of prayers.'

CONCLUSION

In explicating pneumatophobia and Pentecostalism among the Yoruba Christians in southwest Nigeria, the researcher argued for a change in perspectives and approaches to engaging Yoruba cosmologies. He noted that Pentecostalism, especially the indigenous strand, brought a significant breakthrough to the complex spiritual realities missionaries encountered in Africa. He also pointed out that the breakthrough is not without some unbiblical carry-overs, such as an extreme fear of the spirits - pneumatophobia, from some parts of their indigenous worldview. Thus, because of the fear of the spirits that dominates their cosmologies, some seemingly Pentecostal manifestations among them, particularly on 'Prayer Mountains,' may not necessarily be authentic Pentecostal manifestations but an expression of their pneumatophobia with Pentecostal colouration.

Consequently, their prayer has remained focused on dealing with or escaping from the enemies of their destiny. As a result, their faith has become a 'selfie' (self-focus) type, and they rarely understand or remember the mission of the Church, which is to bring shalom to the world. He advocated a shift to a more authentic biblical perspective for the church to be the agent of holistic transformation and God's glory on earth. To achieve this, all hands must be on the deck, and the following recommendations are critical:

First, theological educators, theologians, and other scholars in Africa must clearly emphasise the nature and mission of the church on earth. Some Christians perceive the Christian faith as only a means of dealing with their existential needs with no attached responsibility for them. Understanding the church's nature and mission will help them see the church in its rightful place as the agent of mission Dei, bringing shalom to the world.

Second, the stakeholders of Christianity in Africa, including theological educators, theologians, leaders of denominations and ecumenical bodies, must educate believers and ministers on subjecting their contextualisation processes to re-examination. For instance, they must be guided to understand biblical figures as ancestors. This will prevent them from unnecessarily idolising some Christian leaders as noticed on the field.

Third, stakeholders, particularly those with Pentecostal orientation, must create more awareness on one of the essential motifs of Pentecostalism, the prophethood of all believers, which, in addition to their priesthood, allows every believer free and direct access to God. This would minimise their extreme dependence on 'prophets' for prayer and understanding of God's purpose.

Fourth, believers in Africa, especially gospel ministers, need to prioritise the prominent role of the Bible in all attempts at contextualising the gospel. Evangelical believers need to make more awareness in this regard to prevent a complete syncretisation of Christianity. This may require inductive and more systematic teaching of the Bible.



*Benjamin Isola Akano
akben.dmm@gmail.com*

Benjamin Akano had served as a missionary with Calvary Ministries, an indigenous non-denominational faith-based mission agency, and the Global Missions Board of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. He currently lectures in the Department of Intercultural Studies of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, where he got his PhD in Intercultural Studies, with a Minor in Christian Preaching. He's a fellow of ICETE, and a member of other academic bodies, including ASET, NACCHAMS, and AHS.