

PENTECOSTALISM AND AFRICA-TO-AFRICA MISSIONS-FINANCING PRAXIS

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Key words: *Missions-financing; Africa-to-Africa mission; Pentecostalism.*

Introduction

This article briefly introduces the missions-financing praxis of four Pentecostal churches that are prominent in the emerging African-to-Africa missions, and how this could form a basis for missional practice. The four major churches are, The Church of Pentecost of Ghana, The Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, Light House Chapel International of Ghana, and The Redeemed Christian Church of God of Nigeria. Before we examine the missions-financing of these missional Pentecostal churches, it will be helpful to explain some of the terms that are used in this article, namely, Mission, Missions and Africa-to-Africa missions.

Mission, Missions and Mission-financing

The emerging trend of Africa-to-Africa missions by Pentecostals¹ has recently been defined as ‘missions activity originating from one African country to another African country.’² The impact of African missional activity targeted at Africa, has resulted in a phenomenal growth in membership of Pentecostals. This vitality has raised an important issue of missions-financing. The current missions-financing that most Pentecostals are practicing is based on a legacy inherited from the Azusa street glossolalic experience in the early 20th century, that depends more on the Holy Spirit’s direction, than having a well-crafted missiological financing approach.

The challenge confronting Pentecostals is whether this is the only means of financing God’s mission. To be sure, the church cannot overlook the importance of money and the role financial management plays in missions. Therefore, some major Pentecostal churches in Africa are increasingly becoming aware of the need to deliberately

engage in the practice of raising and allocating financial and other resources to propagate the gospel in other cultures³. Amidst this concerns, Dr C. Bate has raised a critical issue in missions-financing: ‘Despite the importance of money and missions, not much has been studied in the theology literature, and this appears ‘academic neglect.’⁴ The implications of Bate’s critical inquiry could be that Pentecostals have not developed the theoretical and theological underpinnings of missions-financing, and neither have they improved their missions-financing praxis over the years.

The late prominent South African missiologist, David Bosch saw mission as God’s self-revelation, that is, God is the One who loves the world and sent his only Son Jesus Christ to rescue the world. The nature and activity of God, embraces both the church and the world, and the church is privileged to participate in this mission. Bosch further distinguishes mission (singular) from missions (plural), by indicating that missions represents the missionary venture of the Church.⁵ This position of Bosch could be related to the emerging Africa-to-Africa missions trend. As Bosch has clearly stated, the theology of the mission of God is about God’s self-revelation in Christ Jesus that expresses God’s love for the world. However, missions, meaning how each church defines and carries out its response to the mission of God, (that is, missions praxis) will differ from church to church. In effect, each church or denomination must determine what constitutes its own particular missions, and the financial implications. The Africa-to-Africa missions could change for the worse if its financial praxis is not properly defined and managed.

Africa-to-Africa missions

This question regarding missions-financing is unavoidable when we consider Africans sending missionaries within the continent. This issue of missions-financing appears not to have been discussed much in the theology literature of Africa-missions. However, the issue is gaining momentum, with the spread of Pentecostalism in Africa, as a sub-set of the South-to-South missions initiative. The challenge that the Pentecostal churches have to face is how they are going to sustain the Africa-to-Africa or South-to-South missions. Professor David Killingray of University of London’s concern regarding the

need for research in the area of missions-financing in Africa is in the right direction when he examines the way the Western missionary movement used to support missions in Africa. He writes,

The Western missionary movement was sustained by home offices that consistently sought to promote and direct the cause of overseas mission. In sharp contrast, many (perhaps most?) mission agencies in modern Africa lack firm and well-directed administrative infrastructural support. I am not sure if much research has been done in this area of vital support services for missionaries in the field. Are missionaries paid regularly, is there pension provision, care for personal and family health needs, and schooling for children.⁶

Professor Killingray's concern appears to synchronise theologically with that of Bate, pointing out the importance of research on missions-financing in the emerging trend of Africa-to-Africa missions.⁷ Dr Dela Quampah, a Ghanaian missionary of the Church of Pentecost serving in the Republic of South Africa has recently expressed similar concern when writing on the topic: *The changing face of missions: Pentecostal perspective from South Africa*.⁸

Pentecostalism and its vitality has gained major attention among theological and other related scholars, such as Allan Anderson, Opoku Onyinah, G. B. McGee, Mathews Ojo, and J. K. Asamoah-Gyadu⁹

The focus of most of these Pentecostal scholars has been on the spiritual practices of Pentecostals that distinguish them from other denominations, such as, among others, prophecies, healing, speaking in tongues and testimonies confirming the power of God. They do so because these manifestations in worship are what attract the vulnerable communities in Africa. Financial challenges of some African communities may draw them to these Pentecostal manifestations.

Certainly, we do not deny the importance of these spiritual manifestations in the missions of Pentecostal churches. But funding cannot be over emphasized in the need for proper and adequate research regarding the emerging trend of Africa-to-Africa missions. It is for this reason that we have chosen to examine the missions-financing of selected Pentecostal-charismatic churches that are engaged in the Africa-to-Africa missions.

Cases of Current Practice of Missions-Financing

African Pentecostals in their urgency to evangelise the rest of Africa followed the practices of the early Pentecostal missionaries that did not pay much attention to the actual amount of money needed for missions. They trusted God to provide their needs whilst in the mission fields. Even in modern times, some African Independent Churches (AICs) hold this view and practise it. For example, Dr T. A. Oduro, one of the leaders of AICs in West Africa is emphatic that when it comes to determining the financial strength in missions, the church does not need to rely on programmed missions-financing activities, such as designated funding, missions weeks and mission boards.¹⁰ This is a clear indication of how some African churches have carried the early Pentecostal missions-financing practices into the 21st Century. However, most of the Classical Pentecostals have overcome this conservative posture, and seem to be keeping pace with the need to organise finances for missions, according to contemporary economic and theological understandings in Africa.

The Church of Pentecost in Ghana

The Church of Pentecost (COP) in Ghana, one of the Pentecostal missional churches involved in the Africa-to-Africa missions has designated financing for its missions' enterprise. This is done by raising money periodically and prudently allocating it among the mission nations in Africa. They send missionaries to the mission nations and pay their expenses. They also provide infrastructure at strategic points. Financing of operational cost, including salaries of indigenous pastors are paid from the local resources of the mission nations. There have also been supporting social services, and this is done through training and financially empowering missionaries in the African nations. The Church of Pentecost strongly believes that their model of self-financing must be monitored to ensure judicious use of money in the mission nations. However, lack of personnel in some African countries makes effective implementation of these financial structures challenging.¹¹¹¹ The Church of Pentecost. Missions Handbook. Accra: The Church of Pentecost, 2008.

The Apostolic Faith Mission in South Africa

The Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) in South Africa, one of the foremost initiators of Pentecostalism in southern Africa, has been in operation almost immediately after the Azusa street experience in 1908. They therefore carried the immediate effect of the glossolalic experience to Africa, and waded through, up to the present day. However, in recent years, there has been some transformation in their earlier concentration on spiritual issues at the expense of the physical and social needs of the people.

Victor Molobi illustrates the transformation that has occurred within the Pentecostal churches in terms of funding their missions in South Africa, by citing, as an example, the work of The Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa. He points out that recently AFM has created various empowering ventures in response to the needs not only of its members, but also people in the communities they operate¹² For instance, in the township of Tashwane, the AFM has established a mission-financing department that raises money to meet the needs of their members and also that of the community. The department has the responsibility not only to raise the money but to ensure that the funds raised are well managed. The AFM has also done pioneering work in the Indian Ocean in financing missions. Even in theological training, the AFM seeks financial viability. ¹³ AFM is aware that poverty continues to have a toll on the communities, and that as Pentecostals, they have the responsibility to work with other agents in addressing both the spiritual and material needs of the people. These initiatives show differences between the early Pentecostals' approach to missions-financing, as against the present.

Light House Chapel International in Ghana

The Light House Chapel International, which is actively engaged in Africa-to-Africa missions has introduced a method of financing their missionaries sent to African countries. The ministers they send out are professionals who use their professions to engage in missions in Africa, without taking salaries from the church. They depend upon the salaries of the institutions that have employed them.

They seem to be getting on well. However, missions expenses go beyond salaries of missionaries, so the church looks for other means to raise money to pay for other expenses. Dr. Peter White and Dr. Benjamin Acheampong, see finances as one major challenge in advancing the gospel, and they think it must be planned and managed well.¹⁴

The Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria

The Redeemed Christian Church of God has been able to organise enough monies to build structures for worship, wherever they operate in Africa. The church has an organised administration, and has a department for Africa missions. This department caters for the needs of Africa missions. It teaches its members to raise money, and one of the criteria for assessing ministers is their ability to teach people to understand giving. Its African missions has witnessed the building of chapels in the city centres of the African nations. It has brought its missions management to contemporary levels that brings in money for the mission work.¹⁵

In Nigeria, similar to the missions work of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, some non-denominational Christian organisations raise money for missions as well. These Christian organisations, by implication, show some kind of readiness to provide financing model to match the emerging Africa-to-Africa missions. These groups include Gospel Bankers and Mission Supporters.¹⁶ These organisations working with and within the church are giving meaning to mission-financing in contemporary times.

Reflection on Current Missions-Financing

It could be observed from the cases discussed above that Pentecostals have come from the initial position of not giving enough priority to how to raise and manage money in missions to a more conscious approach towards missions-financing. Over the years, they are finding the missions-financing rhythm, as they encounter the reality of challenging economies in Africa.

As mentioned above, structures have been put in place to raise money for the Africa-to-Africa missions. The Church of Pentecost for example has a designated mission directorate, managing a designated missions fund.

They have built financial structures to ensure equity in the allocation of the finances. The Redeemed Christian Church of God has a similar arrangement, but they have gone a step further to dedicate a separate department at its headquarters for Africa missions. This encourages paying attention to Africa in missions, with its peculiar challenges, when it comes to money and missions. Building infrastructure appears to be a major objective of these Pentecostals, especially the neo-Pentecostal churches. The Light House Chapel International's tent-making ministry is another creative initiative for financing missions.

In most of the Pentecostal missions, the finances are geared towards maintaining the missionaries on the ground. In some mission areas, where monies raised are not enough to finance projects which could have direct social impact on the indigenous people, the African headquarters of these churches solicit for funds from Africans in the diaspora to support the Africa-to-Africa missions.

The total financial investment of these Pentecostals, when put together could amount to huge flow of finance for the Africa-to-Africa missions. However, there are no available statistics on this matter, and it is hoped that this issue will be properly addressed in the near future.

Economic context

Missions-financing, like any other human activity must take varying economic contexts into consideration. It is possible for funding to be allocated without considering the economic environment in which the mission is taking place. For example, Sierra Leone and Nigeria are both African nations, but their economic environments are different. This fact must be seriously considered when allocating funds for missions. Unfortunately, this is where earlier Pentecostals failed in their missions-financing planning. This weakness could sneak into current missions-financing praxis and create difficulties for missionaries, who may find it difficult to officially report the reality on the ground to their sending nations. D. R. Dunaetz hints that missionaries normally leave out some of the situations which will not appear 'good' when reporting to their home countries.¹⁷ The objective of this article is to help unearth such issues in missions-financing and find solutions for them.

Paternalistic missions-financing

Missions-financing leading to paternalism was a problem, and still remains a problem in the West-to-Africa missions. It has been observed that the Pentecostals' Africa-to-Africa missions-financing also appears to have some paternalistic tendencies unintentionally in the African mission nations. The receiving mission nations are uncritically ready to follow every instruction from their new African missionaries, once they could get some monies from these African missionaries. James Harries' concern about this missions-financing approach is that it leads to dependency, which makes the culture of the mission nations dependent on the culture of the sending nations.¹⁸ In so doing the Africa-to-Africa missions trend is mimicking the very paternalistic tendencies operated by the West-to-Africa missions-financing that is considered unacceptable by African Pentecostals. Harries believes that God's mission must bring transformation that ensures equality, mutual respect and dignity through the Africa-to-Africa missions.

Giftings Missions-Financing Model

It is important for Africa-to-Africa missions to look for an African specific, self-financing, mission model. It would mean considering the giftings of the various groups of people in the church and how these can be employed in specific missions. This is because financing is not limited to money. Every other resource such as talents and giftings that could support missions must be used. All church members must be encouraged to give voluntarily when it comes to raising resources for missions. This approach could bring about a new understanding of self-supporting for missions. The founder of the Church of Pentecost in Ghana, McKeown, portrays a situation that confirms his own brand of self-financing for missions. In his own words:

You will know that over the years you have built churches, storms have come and you have lost them, it has been a great storm and you have wept as you saw your labour wrecked, now the storm is over, what are you going to do about it? Are you going to follow the example of the little birds, with love in your heart, a song on your lips you set rebuilding, and repair the rages of the storm? As I write this letter I have a minister at my right hand, he promises 200 cedis.

Then I looked up saw a servant girl in the room, I called her and read this letter, she responded at once and said, “I will give 5 cedis.” What, you are a servant, I would have thought if you could give 1 cedi that would have been great; “I will give 5 cedis”, she said. Then I spoke to a boy in the Church Office, he said, “I will give 10 cedis.” What if all the Church responded like that? ¹⁹

The emerging trend of Africa-to-Africa missions financing could consider this simple, but effective way to get almost everyone in the church to promote self-financing. This partly explains why the Church of Pentecost has been one of the leading self-financing Pentecostal churches, and has launched into African missions in a big way. This approach by McKeown places him in the centre of the debate that asks: Was McKeown aware of the self-financing model propagated by Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson in the 19th century or not? Professor Opoku Onyinah maintains that McKeown’s tenacity to understanding and applying the biblical truths produced in McKeown his own brand of self-financing.²⁰ This could be an example for Pentecostals in missions in Africa to consider in the 21st century.

Biblical Models for Missions-Financing

The urgency of Pentecostals’ engagement in missions should lead them to discover what the Bible says about financing God’s mission. Unfortunately, there are some Pentecostals who do not consider that missions-financing is a scriptural term, notwithstanding the numerous biblical references that direct how God’s work must be financed. In Dr M. E. Stevens’ in-depth research on the Temples, Tithes and Taxes, he has argued that the Old Testament was not limited to worship alone, but the worship in the temple was facilitated by financing of activities to sustain the worship.²¹ This makes financing an indispensable activity in God’s mission where the main objective of missions is people responding to God’s love and worshipping him accordingly. What then are the implications of biblical truths in the Old and New Testaments for missions-financing?

In Deuteronomy chapter 14:28-29, part of God’s intention for the tithes was for it to be used according to his instructions. He specifically directed what was to be given to the less-privileged, such as the widows, foreigners, and orphans. God intended all the people to

live in a just and equal community. It was in the light of this that God directed the third year tithes to be given to the less-privileged community among the Jews. When it comes to tithes brought to the Jerusalem Temple, another direction towards fairness is seen by appointing faithful men to administer the tithes (Nehemiah 13:10-13). Indeed, to ensure fairness in the distribution of the tithes, God was also interested in the structures that were set up to manage the funds.

The New Testament also continues in considering the needy and building structures for managing monies that were meant for propagating the gospel. In Luke 8:1-3 the financing of Jesus' ministry included some women who followed Jesus in his travels. The focus of Jesus' financing, apparently included taking care of the needy (John 13: 26, 29; Mark 14:4-6; Matthew 17:24-27). In Luke 9:12 Jesus' direction to the disciples: 'You give them something to eat' (Luke 9:13) could mean they were expected to provide for the needs of the people as an obligation. Again, we see structures set up in the Acts to financially care for the needy and to aid the spread of the gospel in the early church (Acts 6:1-7).

The Apostle Paul's appeal to the Corinthians, and the case study he presented on the Macedonian churches, adds to how missions-financing should be handled (2 Corinthians 8:1-22). The appeal was Christological, and not without spiritual substance. The agape love of God seen in the death of Jesus Christ was the basis of inspiration and motivation. His emphasis was the grace God gave the Macedonian churches, and how they utilised this grace for the furtherance of the gospel. Embodied in the appeal was the careful structure the Apostle Paul put forward to ensure credibility and accountability (2 Corinthians 8:18-21).

The Holy Spirit played a role in guiding the financing of the early church when they met together in fellowship as believers sold their property and laid the money at the feet of the apostles. The Philippian Christians also gave out of their own volition, apparently also propelled by the Holy Spirit working in them (Acts 2:42-47; Philippians 4:10-20). They also supported the missionary trips of the apostle Paul willingly.

This brief biblical survey, brings out pertinent issues that have implications for missions-financing. First, both Old and New

Testaments give prominence to the needy in doing God's mission. This is not limited to financing the communications of the gospel alone, but it goes towards the care of the needy people both inside and outside the church. The implication for financing missions is that every missions-financing programme should include social action in a very comprehensive manner. This could make the gospel more potent and effective. However, the needy people themselves were not excepted from contributing towards achieving God's mission as the Macedonian Christians out of their hardships gave beyond their means (2 Corinthians 8:1-5).

Second, there should be adequate structures to finance the mission projects. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament acknowledge the need for structures. These structures could help monitor the finances in an equitable manner, to diffuse possible challenges arising from financing. Effective structures encourage sustainable missions financing.

Third, like any other function of the church, the Holy Spirit should be allowed to work among the people when it comes to missions-financing. This could involve teaching the biblical truth on giving, since proper understanding of the Word of God could facilitate giving.

Fourth, best practice should be applied in the context of raising or allocating finances for missions. For example, the circumstances in Acts chapter 6:1-7 called for the church which was growing to pray and adopt a strategy of appointing capable people to care for the finances, and other social needs of the church.

Conclusion

By reviewing the missions-financing models of some Pentecostal-charismatic churches this study has opened up a rather important subject in the Pentecostal discourse on missions-financing, which some considered not so relevant for the African church in mission. It has brought into focus the need for building structures for mission-financing that will ensure proper accounting for finances and other resources in the Africa-to-Africa missions. The study also has encouraged dependence on the Holy Spirit in working out structures for missions-financing. Finally, it is hoped that this article will provoke individual Pentecostal missional churches to engage in research in their missions-financing praxis.

End Notes

- ¹ Pentecostals in this study represent the classical Pentecostals as well as the neo-Pentecostals.
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