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CROSSING THE FRONTIER TO SURVIVE: MAINSTREAM CHURCHES AND THE ‘PENTECOST’ IN BUEA-CAMEROON, 1960-2020

Francis Arsène Fogue Kuate* & Solanch Nayah Ndokuo**

Abstract: This study deals with the borrowing of Pentecostal practices by mainstream churches in the town of Buea in Cameroon. Contrary to the impression given by the conceptualizers of ‘Pentecost’ who consider it as a de-territorialized place or a space characterized by the only presence of Pentecostals and their culture, this reflection which relies on diffusion theory, postulates that ‘Pentecost’ is not solely a matter of Pentecostals. It is a heterogeneous sphere shared by mainstream and Pentecostal churches. This sharing has led to the borrowing of Pentecostal religious forms by the former notably through proximity and media used to diffuse Pentecostal culture. By focusing on Buea which religious setting is a mosaic of Christian Churches with more than one hundred Pentecostal groups and about only six mainstream churches, the paper states that the latter are progressively becoming part of ‘Pentecost’ by adopting Pentecostal style. Pentecostal forms are usually expressed in mainstream churches activities principally through the way of preaching and praying. In some cases Pentecostal songs are even performed by church members. In the Catholic Church precisely, these forms are highly noticed in charismatic renewal groups where healings, glossolalia and crusades which are key features of ‘Pentecost’ are also practiced. The work relies on qualitative data collected in Buea through interviews, participant observation and media.

Key Words: Mainstream Churches, ‘Pentecost’, Religious practices, Pentecostalisation, Buea-Cameroon.

Résumé: *Cette étude traite de la pentecôtisation des églises chrétiennes dites traditionnelles dans la ville camerounaise de Buéa. Contrairement*

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à l'impression donnée par les concepteurs du « Pentecost » qui le considèrent comme un lieu déterritorialisé ou un espace caractérisé par la seule présence des pentecôtistes et de leur culture, cette réflexion qui s'appuie sur la théorie de la diffusion, postule que le « Pentecost » n'est pas exclusivement pentecôtiste. C'est une sphère hétérogène où cohabitent les églises pentecôtistes et non-pentecôtistes. Cette cohabitation a conduit à l'emprunt de formes religieuses pentecôtistes par les non-pentecôtistes, notamment du fait de leur proximité et à travers les médias utilisés pour diffuser la culture pentecôtiste. En se concentrant sur Buéa, dont l'univers religieux est constitué d'une mosaïque d'Églises chrétiennes avec plus d'une centaine de groupes pentecôtistes et environ six églises traditionnelles, l'analyse démontre que ces dernières font progressivement partie du « Pentecost » du fait de l'adoption des styles et des formes propres au pentecôtisme à l'instar de la façon de prêcher et de prier. Dans certains cas, des chants pentecôtistes sont même interprétés dans les Églises traditionnelles ici représentées par L'Église Catholique Romaine, la Baptist Church et la Presbyterian Church in Cameroon. Dans l'Église catholique précisément, ces formes sont très présentes au sein des groupes charismatiques où sont également pratiquées les délivrances, la glossolalie et les croisades qui sont des éléments caractéristiques du « Pentecost ». La réflexion s'appuie sur des données qualitatives collectées à Buéa à travers des interviews, l'observation participante et les médias.

Mots clés : *Églises Chrétiennes traditionnelles, 'Pentecost', pratiques religieuses, Pentecôtisation, Buéa-Cameroun.*

Introduction

From an ecclesiological perspective, the notion of mainstream generally refers to churches which are influential from the perspective of the membership. They are denominational and have a good number of members. The mainstream then refers to the majority opposed to a minority (Willander, 2020). This demographical influence which characterizes mainstream churches has a chronological/historical justification in the sense that those churches were created many centuries ago. Contrary to the Pentecostal movement that appeared in the 20th century in America (Azusa Street), the Catholic Church and mainstream protestant Churches were instituted respectively in the 4th and the 16th century. Their mainstreamness then derives from their anteriority and their high demography compared with Pentecostalism. In the context of Buea, they are

represented by the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), the Baptist Church and the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC). In Cameroon, these mainstream churches are “presented by their followers as the dominant religious tradition, ignoring the existence of others, particularly indigenous and fundamental Evangelical faiths” (Lang, 2014:282). This illustrates the conflicting relationship existing between them and Pentecostal movements.

Though these mainstream churches are opposed to Pentecostal groups, it has become recurrent to see them adopting and practicing Pentecostal forms and culture in Buea, the administrative headquarter of the South West Region of Cameroon. As an administrative unit, this region belongs to the Anglophone part of Cameroon which is adjacent to neighboring Nigeria from where Pentecostalism was diffused in the Cameroonian territory (Akoko, 2007). Thanks to this geographical proximity with Nigeria, Buea -like other major towns of the former British Southern Cameroons which were administered from Nigeria during the colonial period- is one of the cradle of Pentecostalism in Cameroon. The movement which was introduced in the town in 1960 through the Apostolic Church coming from Nigeria, has evolved along the years to become the most visible and popular religious trend in Buea. However, despite the increasing number of Pentecostal churches, the influence of Pentecostalism in Buea cannot be efficiently portrayed by assessing the number of its members but through the spread of the Pentecostal culture among non-Pentecostal Christians.

As a matter of fact, Pentecostal cultural style that Birgit Meyer (2004) calls ‘Pentecostalite’ and which encompasses the ways of preaching, singing, praying and the vocabulary of the Pentecostals, has been progressively borrowed by mainstream churches in a context of religious competition whereby the use of media by Pentecostals contributed in attracting their members in search of healing and miracles. In reaction to that competition, mainstream churches strategically borrowed born-again practices in order to avoid the emigration of their members to Pentecostal churches. Through this borrowing, they integrated what Eriksen (2017) calls “Pentecost”.

By definition, ‘Pentecost’ is an analytical device proposed by Annelin Eriksen in the study of Pentecostalism. It refers to a universe soaked up by Pentecostal practices and culture. The concept suggests that Pentecostalism which has become a global phenomenon exists in an “un-sited” and “de-territorialised form” and should then be “detached from local context [and] understood in its ‘pure’ absolute form” (Eriksen, 2017:3). It is used to locate Pentecostalism in spaces understood here, not from a geographical and material perspective, but

non-geographical and de-materialized spaces infused by Pentecostal ideology and practices. This analytical construction which allows to construe Pentecostalism as a unique and standardized object in different geographical locations (Eriksen, Blanes & MacCarthy, 2019), has some limitations in the sense that it does not consider the system or the context in which ‘Pentecost’ evolves. Without disqualifying this analytical device, Birgit Meyer (2019) opines that the construe of ‘Pentecost’ as “a separate place independent from the region in which it is situated..” should take into consideration the otherness in the sense that ‘Pentecostalism’ is not isolated and the “born again Christians cohabit with all sorts of others who are perceived as enemies” (pp.211-212). Based on this criticism formulated by Birgit Meyer, this study intends to demonstrate how the cohabitation of the Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal universes resulted in the adoption of Pentecostal practices and style by mainstream churches.

This paper then interrogates the incorporation of mainstream churches in ‘Pentecost’ by highlighting their relationship with Pentecostalism. Given the fact that the religious ecosystem of Buea is highly influenced by the Pentecostal style, the analysis raises the issue of the Pentecostalization of mainstream Churches that were introduced in the town well before the arrival of Pentecostal movements. This problematic has been discussed in other African religious settings. For instance, Cephias Omenyo (2005) shows how the charismatic phenomenon has moved from the fringes to the center through the integration of Pentecostal features in all the mainstream historic churches in Ghana. This contributed in blurring the distinction between the two categories of churches.

While comparing the relationship of Pentecostalism with Catholic Church and mainstream Protestants in Nigeria, Benjamin Diara and Nkechinyere Onah (2014) indicate that “Protestant denominations have tended to contribute more towards the promotion of Pentecostalism than the Catholic denomination” (p.395). To them, the justification of this differentiation derives from the fact that Protestants churches are freer than Catholics from an organizational and ideological perspective. In the same vein, Jonathan Kangwa (2016) uses the United Church of Zambia as a case study to demonstrate the extent to which Pentecostal-charismatic Movements are challenging mainstream churches in Africa by redefining their missionary activities and their responses to people’s spiritual, physical and socioeconomic needs. These different works discuss the influence of Pentecostalism on mainstream churches without elaborating on its channels.

The study postulates that the Pentecostalization of mainstream churches in Buea is underlain by Pentecostal media which help in diffusing Pentecostal features as demonstrated by Birgit Meyer (2004), Katrien Pype (2012) and Marleen de Witte (2003, 2018). Therefore, the study uses the theory of diffusionism which deals with the inventiveness and transmission of cultural values or characters from one specific society or group to another, to unveil the mechanisms of the progressive absorption of mainstream churches into 'Pentecost'. By relying on Malinowski's ideology "that culture can be contracted only by contagion and that man is an imitative animal", diffusionism implies the creation of a cultural trait in a specific community and its appearance in another community (Blaut, 1987:31). That is what Ngugi Wa Thiong'O (1993) conceives as conversation of cultures that is, the interactions of cultures devoid of any rhetoric of domination. However, in the context of this work, the notion of contagion is not appropriated in the sense that it relativizes the will and the efforts of the community involved in the imitation process. Contagion is mostly casual and the person contaminated can be a passive victim whereas imitation also results from an active initiative. For some contextual reasons, a person or a community can deliberately decide to adopt a cultural trend as it is the case with non-Pentecostals in Buea.

Besides, this classical approach of diffusionism which presumes the geographically based existence of a core that produces a culture and a periphery that is infused by it, is revisited here because the producers (Pentecostals) and the adoptive (non-Pentecostals) communities are sharing and living in the same landscape. There is therefore no core and no periphery conceived from a spatial perspective. Instead, there is a setting made up by different religious communities and in which the cultural traits of Pentecostalism is infiltrating that of others Christian denominations through a process of borrowing and adoption. In this case, and contrary to what Bartlett opines (Wagomer, 2014:137), the contact of cultures that creates possibilities for the borrowing does not only involve the migration of foreign groups that meet with indigenous ones, and does not always give way to intercommunication between the two groups. The cultural borrowing can come as a result of a longstanding cohabitation and can be unidirectional even if the dominant group can undergo some internal adjustments stemming from its contacts with the dominated ones. That is what is observed in the religious ecosystem of Buea where the cultural borrowing is undergone only by mainstream churches that renegotiated their modernity through a reconstruction process based on the incorporation of Pentecostal forms in their religious

practices. From there, the religious landscape of Buea witnessed the creation of a ‘pentecostalized community’ which is a kind of “imagined community” (Anderson 2006) or better still an aesthetic formation (Meyer 2009). This community is a religious cultural cluster regrouping all the Christians sharing Pentecostal practices and style. It is imagined because it is not structured and its members are not conscious of their membership in it. It is an aesthetic formation in the sense that it is perpetually molded by Pentecostals forms and styles.

The gist of the matter now is to know how the adoptive community here represented by mainstream churches came to adopt Pentecostal style. What is the process through which mainstream churches have been adopting Pentecostal culture and what have been the facilitators of that process between 1960, when the first Pentecostal church was implanted in Buea and 2020 which corresponds to the holding of a mega crusade by the Living Water Catholic Charismatic Renewal of the Diocese of Buea with men of God coming from Nigeria for the first time?

In order to answer this question, a field work was conducted in Buea between 2017 and 2020. Interviews were carried out with members and leaders of Pentecostal and mainstream churches. Data collected through interviews were completed with participant observation which mainly consisted in participating in Pentecostal and mainstream churches’ services in order to be able to grasp and compare their practices. Videos posted on Facebook pages of Pentecostal churches and programs of Pentecostal Televisions and radios also helped in capturing Pentecostal practices and sounds notably during deliverance sessions. The material collected was analyzed thematically by focusing on (1) the encounter of Pentecostal and mainstream churches in Buea, (2) the perception of Pentecostalism by mainstream churches and (3) the promotion of Pentecostal style among non-Pentecostal Christians in Buea.

The Encounter of Mainstream and Pentecostal Churches in Buea

Non-Pentecostal (mainstream Protestants and Catholic) and Pentecostal churches belong to Christianity which is an imported religion in Africa in the sense that it started, developed and was introduced in the continent from Europe (Ilogu, 1979:121). Just like in the other areas of Africa, Buea came in contact with Christianity in the framework of colonization.

As a matter of fact, Christianity was introduced in the coastal area of Cameroon and more precisely in the South West Region where Buea is located in the 19th century with the arrival of the British Baptist Missionary Society in 1844. This missionary society coming from Fernando Po was led by Alfred Saker who

later on moved to Douala leaving behind Joseph Merrick who intensified the mission in Bimbia and its surroundings. After the departure of the Baptist Missionaries by 1850, the natives who were associated with them took over and continued the missionary work (Weber, 1993: 2). Local populations got acclimatized and attached to the Baptist mission to the extent that they were reluctant to follow the Basel Mission which arrived in 1886 from Germany with the aim of replacing the Baptist Missionary Society in the framework of the implementation of the German Protectorate inaugurated in July 1884 through the Germano-Duala treaty. During the First World War (1914-1918), the Missionaries of the Basel Mission were arrested and sent back to Germany in 1915 by the allies (France and Great Britain). In 1925, the Basel Mission returned to Cameroon that was partitioned in 1916 between the French and the British. They decided to limit their work to the British part of the territory and more precisely in British Southern Cameroons that was having Buea as one of the major towns. The presence and activities of the Baptist Missionary Society and the Basel Mission in the British Southern Cameroon -which constitutes the Anglophone part of Independent Cameroon after reunification with the former French Cameroon in 1961- led to the creation of local churches respectively the Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC) established in 1954 and the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon that gained autonomy -from the Basel Mission- in 1957 (Lang, 2017:28).

Contrary to the Baptist Missionary Society and the Basel Mission that implanted indigenous and autonomous churches, the Catholics maintained local churches under the control and the leadership of Rome. The first Catholic congregation was created in the area in 1904 by the Pallotin Fathers in the small village of Bojongo, a village bordering Buea (Mveng, 1990; Konings, 2003, 2009). In the framework of the First World War (1914-1916), the German missionaries who arrived Cameroon in 1890 were replaced by the French of the Sacred Heart Fathers (Messina & Slageren, 2005). After the partition of German Kamerun between France and Great Britain in 1916, the British administered their portion of the territory from Nigeria¹. In that context, the action of the French Sacred Heart Fathers was limited to French Cameroon while British Cameroon placed under the apostolic prefecture of Eastern Nigeria led by Bishop Joseph Shanahan. In 1922, the Mill Hill Missionaries were given the charge over British Southern Cameroon and Buea became an Apostolic Prefecture in 1923 under

¹ The British divided their portion of the Cameroonian territory into two main administrative units: the British Northern Cameroon predominantly Muslim and the British Southern Cameroon which was Christian.

Mgr. William Campling. In 1939, Buea was made Apostolic vicariate before being raised to a Diocese under the Archdiocese of Onitsha in 1950. In the framework of the Reunification of French and British Cameroon in 1961, Buea was detached from Nigeria and attached to the Archdiocese of Yaoundé.

This is to say that mainstream churches found in Buea are an emanation of western missionary activities carried out within the framework of colonization. Thus the PCC, the CBC and the RCC which constitute the mainstream Christianity in Buea have a western origin. They preceded Pentecostalism that came at the beginning of the 1960s, that is, during the period of independence.

Just like the mainstream churches, Pentecostalism was imported in Buea. It was first introduced in Cameroon precisely in Victoria² in 1949 during the colonial trusteeship period by Evangelist Oyoyo from Cross River State in Nigeria. From there it was disseminated to other areas of British Cameroon notably in Buea where it was introduced in 1960 through the Apostolic Church also coming from Nigeria. The latter constitutes the cradle of Cameroonian Pentecostalism since most of the Pentecostal groups in Cameroon and in Buea in Particular, originated from Nigeria. This is justified by the proximity of Buea with Nigeria where many Anglophones travelled to for business and studies. Young Cameroonians who went to study in Nigeria came into contact with Pentecostalism in university campuses which constitute the mold of charismatic fervor observed in African churches as contended by John O. Magbadelo (2004). For this reason, Buea is almost a replica of what happens in Nigeria in terms of Pentecostalism (Akoko, 2007:9).

The Apostolic Church was first established in Soppo (a quarter of Buea) before expanding its tentacles to the other areas of the town of Buea. It is also in Soppo that the PCC has implanted two of its congregations (Small Soppo and Great Soppo).

One year after the implantation of the Apostolic Church, Pentecostalism reinforced its roots in Buea with the arrival of the Full Gospel Mission in 1961 (Akoko, 2004: 48-49). The Movement led by a German missionary known as Knorr Werner was first implanted in the neighboring town of Mutengene before expanding to Buea the same year. The first church was established at Buea Town (another quarter of Buea) with very few members. But with time, the Full Gospel Mission evolved to become one of the largest Pentecostal movements in terms of

² The town of Victoria which has been named after the Queen of England was founded by the Baptist Missionary Alfred Saker. After independence and Reunification (1961) it was renamed Limbe.

adherents and denominations in Cameroon as a whole (Ibid). According to the statistics of the Church, in 2019, Buea harbored twenty seven Full Gospel Churches distributed in the various quarters of the town.³ The main branch of the church was established in Molyko in 1964. It is geographically located in between the PCC and the RCC Molyko branches.

The Apostolic church and the Full Gospel Mission constitute the pioneers of Pentecostalism in Buea. Their settlement corresponds to the first wave of Pentecostalism in Cameroon. That first wave which stretched from 1960 to 1990 was achieved in a context whereby “the government discouraged the formation of associations including religious groups, for political reasons” (Akoko, 2002:364). That is the reason why mainly two Pentecostal churches succeeded to settle and carry out activities in Buea before 1990. The context prevailing before 1990 was therefore beneficial to mainstream churches since it was difficult for new churches to be created. But the situation changed drastically after 1990 due to the economic crisis and the institutionalization of the freedom of associations in the framework of the democratization process. Pentecostal churches benefited from law n° 90/53 of 19th December 1990 that allowed the creation of associations and considered churches as religious associations. But this creation is subjected to a regime of authorization.⁴

The new legal framework had a metastasis effect on Pentecostalism in the sense that it led to the multiplication of churches despite some challenges related to the obtaining of an authorization. This explains why many Pentecostal churches in Buea exist and carry out their activities illegally benefiting from “an administrative tolerance” from State representatives. Others operate under the guise of already existing legal churches generally known as “umbrella churches”⁵. From only 02 Pentecostal churches before 1990, Buea counted about 100 churches in the second wave of Pentecostalism (field work, 2019). In the global evolution of Pentecostalism, this second wave is seen as the “Re-Evangelisation of Africa” (Kalu, 2008). It corresponds to what is known as “New Pentecostalism” which is characterized by a transition from asceticism to a prosperity gospel (Akoko, 2004 & 2007).

³ Those churches are mainly located in the following quarters: Buea town, Great Soppo, Bova, Muea, Ndongo, Mamu, Malingo, and Bokova

⁴In order to have a legal status new churches must request for and receive an authorization from the State through the Ministry of Territorial Administration.

⁵ Interview with Paul Talla, Youth leader of Baptist Church Soppo Field, Buea, 31years, 7th August 2019.

As a matter of fact, apart from the legal framework, the second wave of Pentecostalism which paved the way for the hegemony of Pentecostal churches and practices in Buea benefited from the economic crisis. Due to the effects of unemployment and poverty, many people developed interest in Pentecostalism in search of miracles and spiritual healings in a context whereby medical healthcare became very expensive for the majority of Cameroonians (Akoko, 2007:9). People lost confidence in the State and also in mainstream churches that were not able to fulfill their needs. Pentecostal churches thus gained ground by adapting their discourse to the needs and expectations of populations.

The Pentecostal doctrine that was initially based on asceticism –with the first wave- started promoting a gospel of prosperity which can be understood as the “nexus of Christian faith and wealth” (Aquandah, 2020). This religious ideology promising prosperity contributed in attracting new born-again and increasing the membership of Pentecostal groups. Surprisingly, this increase in number of Pentecostals did not correlate with the decrease of poverty. The promise of prosperity which was initially unconditional and based on the theology of “Ask you shall be given”, by philanthropic engagement of Pentecostal leaders and neo-liberal capitalist ideologies encouraging business (Ijaola, 2018). Pentecostalism thus promoted “religious engineering” where individuals (Leaders and church members) are called upon to act as engineers of their own life and subjectivity (Aquandah, 2020). Pentecostalism then encourages the development of a spirit of business where the spirit also becomes a business as indicated by Marleen de Witte (2011) through what she coins as the ‘Business of the Spirit’.

Therefore, the encounter of mainstream and Pentecostal churches in Buea came as a result of a historical process that started in 19th century with the arrival of Baptists Missionary Society and the Basel mission which preceded the coming of the Pallotine missionaries of the Catholic Church and the progressive settlement/invasion of Pentecostal churches as from 1960. After a period of security during which they dominated the religious ecosystem of Buea, the mainstream churches that emanated from the western missionary activities entered into a phase of competition with Pentecostal churches more precisely during the second wave of Pentecostalism that began in the 1990s. The said competition determined the attitude of mainstream churches toward Pentecostal groups.

The Perception of Pentecostalism by Mainstream Churches

The fast advancement of Pentecostalism on the religious landscape of Buea especially since the 1990s resulted to a competition between the mainstream and Pentecostal churches. Contrary to the passivity they showed in northern Cameroon due to the influence of Islam and that was conceptualized as “technique of convenience” (Fogue, 2017), Pentecostal movements have been more offensive in Christian settings like Buea. Their rapid growth in the town made it attractive to some members of mainstream churches leading to a decrease of their membership. As a result, the latter developed an ambivalent and differentiated attitude towards Pentecostalism.

After describing the process that led to the encounter of mainstream and Pentecostal churches in Buea, this section now looks at the perception of the latter by the former. The analysis of this perception is important in evaluating the nature and the trends of the borrowing of Pentecostal forms by mainstream churches. Globally, Pentecostalism is perceived as a threat by leaders of old Christian churches although their attitude seems to be ambivalent; The Baptist Church had a tolerant attitude towards Pentecostalism while the PCC and the RCC expressed reluctance before changing their positions.

As a matter of fact, the Baptist church developed a spirit of tolerance towards Pentecostalism. It did not reject or castigate Pentecostal churches but looked for a way to live and survive with them. However, the Baptists operated a differentiation between true and false Pentecostal churches. They considered as true, those of the Pentecostal churches having a well-organized structure with trained pastors. In line with the data gotten from the field, false Pentecostal churches are those led by people who did not undergo any formal religious training and who claimed to rely on spiritual revelation.⁶ Such churches are financially oriented and give priority to miracle performances which constitute their main attractiveness.

Thus, the Baptist church collaborated with Pentecostal groups they considered legit. This collaboration consists in attending Pentecostal programs and inviting Pentecostals leaders for religious services and occasions like crusades. In 2015 a prophet from a Pentecostal background led a crusade in Baptist church (Macedonia Baptist Church Soppo)⁷. This portrays a high degree of ‘Pentecostalization’ of the Baptist Church which has established formal

⁶ Interview with Ntan John, Pastor Winners Chapel International, 50years old, Buea

⁷ Participant observation.

partnerships with the Full Gospel Mission and Winners' Chapel International since 1963 and 2003 respectively⁸.

As far as the Presbyterian Church is concerned, its leaders have a critical view about Pentecostalism. Some of them we interviewed argued that the Pentecostals focus their religiosity on the Spirit over God unlike the PCC which recognizes both God the father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Others deplored the relationship of Pentecostal movements with money and wealth arguing that Pentecostal leaders are more interested in enriching themselves than caring about the spiritual wellbeing of their members.⁹ This denotes the resistance of PCC leadership towards Pentecostalism. Despite this resistance, the church progressively borrowed from Pentecostal practices with the aim of preventing the transhumance of members who constantly moved to Pentecostal churches. But unlike what was observed in Yaoundé with the emergence of a well-organized born-again inspired revival led by Michael Bame Bame (Akoko 2007:54), the adoption of Pentecostal forms by the PCC in Buea was not structured and institutionalized. It was not organized through movements and groups contrary to what was obtained in the Catholic Church.

With regard to the RCC, its attitude towards Pentecostalism evolved from an opposition to an adoption of Pentecostal practices. Giving the divergence of ideologies with Pentecostalism, the RCC started by opposing to the integration and adoption of Pentecostal practices by its members. One of the main historical happenings that portrayed this opposition is related to the Maranatha Movement founded in 1991 by a catholic Priest known as Father Etienne Khumba (Konings 2003:41). The movement that was created as a charismatic prayer group aiming at encouraging religious renewal in the Catholic Church through individual spirituality progressively adopted Pentecostal ideology (Akoko 2007:58). Father Etienne rapidly became a "healing priest" by according a special consideration to deliverance from evil. This evolution did not please the hierarchy of RCC. The priest was sanctioned and his movement was suspended in December 1996 (Konings 2009:60). But after this episode, the Catholic Church in Buea had to revise its position towards Pentecostalism which influence was going crescendo. Charismatic groups which were introduced in Buea since 1973 by father Bill

⁸ Interview with Tah Christopher, Pastor of PCC Molyko, Buea, 48years old, Buea, 7th August 2019.

⁹ Interview with Tah Christopher, Pastor of PCC Molyko, Buea, 48years old, Buea, 7th August 2019

Tolan after attending a charismatic retreat in Mbengwi monastery increased in number and started adopting Pentecostal practices like speaking in tongues¹⁰.

Almost all the parishes of Buea have a charismatic group which in most cases functions out of the control of priests. These groups embody a religious renewal within the Catholic Church by carrying out activities which do not belong to the catholic liturgy. Globally, the origins of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is historically situated in 1967 when a history professor, William Storey, and a graduate student, Ralph Kiefer of Pittsburgh's Duquesne University (PA) were baptized in the Holy Spirit in a charismatic prayer group of Episcopalians (Ciciliot, 2019:253-254). From then, many Catholics experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This evolution benefitted from the tolerant attitude of Pope John XXIII (1958-1963) towards Pentecostal ideologies. During his pontificate, priority was given to the Holy Spirit and he “believed that a new Pentecost could blow through the Church” (Moran, 2013:288). Before the opening of the Second Vatican Council in 1962, he prayed the prayer of invocation: ‘Lord renew your wonders in this our day as by a new Pentecost’. It is from there that “the grace of Pentecost was poured out in an unexpected way upon the whole [Catholic] Church” (Ibid).

Despite the fact that the Catholic Church in Buea does not officially collaborate with Pentecostal movements, many members of charismatic renewal groups attend Pentecostal programs like crusades especially to learn from Pentecostal ways of healing and deliverance. Besides, the membership of these groups is opened to both Roman Catholics and non-Catholics which shows their independence towards the hierarchy of the church.¹¹ The activities of some of these groups incorporate the organization of crusades in collaboration with Pentecostal “men of God”. For instance in November 2020, the Living Water Charismatic Renewal of the Diocese of Buea, organized an inclusive six days Mega crusade (24th-29th November 2020) where some Catholic priests of Buea were involved alongside with Pentecostal oriented religious leaders like Evangelist Ephraim Obinna Nwankwo, and Reverend Father Cyriacus Offor MSP invited from Nigeria.

¹⁰ Interview with Kum Cletus, 36 years old, catechist St Charles Lwanga, Buea, 9/8/2020. See also SNRCCC, “Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the Diocese of Buea”, online: <https://snrcc-cameroun.org/index.php/en/news/12-catholic-charismatic-renewal-in-the-diocese-of-buea> (assessed on 22nd/10/2020).

¹¹ Interview with Christophe Bertrand, Reverend Father, Saint Peter and Paul Parish Buea, 39 years, Buea, 7th August 2019.

Thus, mainstream churches responded differently to the growing visibility of Pentecostalism in Buea. Roman Catholic Church and Presbyterian Church in Cameroon in particular shared similar opinion about Pentecostal movements. This opinion can be summarized through the following statement made by Father James of Saint Charles Lwanga parish: “Pentecostalism has always been a means to an end to the leaders of the Pentecostal churches. The establishment of Pentecostal churches is aimed at extorting money from the members through their practices”¹². This means that for some members of the Catholic clergy, Pentecostal leaders made a living through the church. The mainstreaming opinions of mainstream churches also meant that the Bible was used as a business strategy to acquire wealth by Pentecostal leaders. This Perception implies that Pentecostal leaders used the word of God as a product supplied to the needy with respect to their demands using money as the medium of exchange.

However, this depreciative picture of Pentecostalism painted by leaders of mainstream churches contradicts with the growing borrowing and adoption process of Pentecostal forms and practices by the members of their churches. This process is instilled by the activities of Pentecostal media which diffuse the Pentecostal culture.

The Borrowing of Pentecostal Style by non-Pentecostals: the Role of Media

The encounter and contact of mainstream and Pentecostal churches in Buea has led to a progressive pentecostalization of the former. This pentecostalization consists in the adoption of Pentecostal religious forms and practices which can be labelled as style. The style emphasizes on appearance and materiality. It embodies a diverse construct that can be identified in a pragmatic and process oriented mode by the continuous use of a similar behavioral pattern (Heinz, 2010). By relying on Max Weber reflections on art and religion, Birgit Meyer (2004) conceives the style as an element of differentiation which contributes in fabricating a specific religious aesthetic. In the domain of Pentecostalism, this aesthetic relies notably on sensational forms which are “authorized modes for invoking and organizing access to the transcendental that shape both religious contents [...] and norms” (Meyer, 2010b:751). Religious style then deals with practices of worship and thus embraces all the patterns in which church services

¹² Interview with James, Reverend Father, Saint Charles Lwanga Parish Buea, 41years old, Buea, 7th August 2019.

are organized and performed (Koehrsen, 2017). While applied to Pentecostalism, it refers to practices and patterns which are specific to Pentecostals and their borrowing by other religious denominations leads to a process of Pentecostalization.

In Buea, this process was first observed in PCC as indicated by Akoko (2007). As time evolved, many other Christian denominations were also penetrated by the Pentecostal culture which gradually dominated the religious ecosystem of Buea. However, this penetration was not done from above but from below as it was initiated by church members who have been consuming pentecostalite on daily basis through Pentecostal media and also due their proximity with Pentecostal churches which are found in almost all the streets of the town. These two main factors have greatly contributed in familiarizing non-Pentecostal Christians with Pentecostal or born-again vocabulary and ways of singing and praying.

As a matter of fact, Pentecostal vocabulary is an important indicator of the Pentecostalization of non-Pentecostals. The latter have progressively adopted the Pentecostal lingo. It has become common to hear non-Pentecostal using expressions like: ‘Praise the Lord’, ‘God forbid’; ‘in Jesus’ name’; ‘back to sender’. These expressions have a Pentecostal background and specific meanings to the born-again. Even if non-Pentecostals using them are not really imbued by their meanings and ideological contents, the fact that they use it is a symbol of the cultural hegemony of the Pentecostal culture on the social setting of Buea. Another indicator of this hegemony is seen through the way of singing and praying.

The participant observation carried out in catholic and protestant mainstream churches have revealed a Pentecostalization of their liturgy. The solemnity and silence that usually characterized masses have been altered by sounds and shouts from the crowd. This has been observed in many occasions in Saint Peter and Paul Parish -known as the university Parish and located close to the University of Buea- where Father Jude Wanki liked performing Pentecostal songs during services and even at the time of the consecration of communion which is usually a moment of meditation. In addition to this, some other priests preached by raising their voices and shouting in the microphone like Pentecostal preachers. Members attending the mass also respond to the statements he makes by shouting “amen”. Besides, the way of singing that was orientated towards classical music has been replaced by popular way of singing with the clapping of hands and even dancing in church.

The implementation of these born-again oriented new ways of preaching and singing in the Catholic Church is informed by the policy of inculturation promoted by Pope John Paul II during the closing of the Second Vatican Council in 1985. Through inculturation, the Roman Catholicism intends to “encourage sensitivity to various cultural contexts” by safeguarding the integrity of the Gospel (Doyle, 2012:1). This policy has a strategic function in the sense that it helps in encouraging people of a specific cultural context to identify themselves to the church by integrating elements of their local culture in the liturgy. It is in that perspective that the Catholic Church in Buea became flexible towards Pentecostal practices.

The same flexibility was also observed in protestant churches where famous Pentecostal songs were performed during church services. The use of those songs led to the integration of percussions played to accompany the voices of the faithful exactly the way it is done in Pentecostal churches. Services in mainstream protestant churches have then become more animated and the production of noise that was peculiar to Pentecostal services has also integrated the activities of those protestant churches.

In addition, the borrowing of Pentecostal forms and practices was also observed during crusades organized by non-Pentecostal Churches. During these occasions, prayers and healings were performed following Pentecostal canons. Pastors and priests used wireless microphones to produce “spiritual sounds” like it is done in Pentecostal milieu. Sound and sonic experience are part of religious practices (Hackett 2012:12) and constitute with hearing one of the optimal entries to explore the materiality and immateriality of a specific religious culture (Hackett 2020). People attending the crusades used to reproduce the same attitudes as Pentecostals by shouting and rolling on the floor.

Another Pentecostal style expressed during the organization of crusades is the usage of posters in communication strategies. Posters like other media flyers are mainly used by Pentecostals in their religious adverts and proselytism (Ukah 2014). They are “quintessential Pentecostal advertising strategy” (Ukah 2004: 422). Due to their spread in the town of Buea, other religious denominations borrowed that Pentecostal communication tool. That was the case with the Living Water Catholic Charismatic Renewal as seen on the following picture.

Picture: 2020 Crusade Advert Poster of the Living Water Catholic Charismatic Renewal



©The authors, 2020

This poster was used by the Living Water Catholic Charismatic Renewal to advertise its crusade. What captures one's attention on it is the addition of the "Living Water" on the name of this Catholic Charismatic group in Buea. This expression is typically Pentecostal and its usage by this group reveals its Pentecostal orientation. Also, the similarity of this poster with those of Pentecostals is another cause for concern. Its aesthetic norms follow the characteristics of Pentecostal posters that Miescher (2001) portrays as follows: "A Pentecostal poster is a compressed structure in visual communication utilizing images, signs, colors, symbols and a limited number of words" (Miescher 2001 quoted by Ukah, 2004:422). In the same vein, Ukah (2014:174) opines that "Pentecostal posters carry a catchy (or seductive) caption, usually stylistically designed with bold, colourful lettering". These two descriptions indicate the same things and thus, confirm the idea that Pentecostal posters have specific features which all appear on the above poster made by a Catholic Charismatic Renewal group.

As indicated previously, this borrowing of Pentecostal practices, styles and behaviors by members of mainstream churches is facilitated by Pentecostal media. The latter dominate the audio-visual landscape of Buea and promote

Pentecostal practices through their programs that mainly consist in sermons, prayers and religious animation.

Pentecostalism is characterized by its entanglement with media (radio, television, and social media). Instead of looking at religion and media from the paradigms of 'sacred' and 'secular', they rather possess an intrinsic relationship (De Witte, 2003). These media are not mere communication tools but socio-technological institutions that contribute in shaping the religious realm (Grätz, 2014). They guarantee the presence of the Holy Spirit by "being sanctified as suitable harbingers of divine power without which it could not be transmitted and present" (Meyer, 2010a:124). This intrinsic relationship has made the media to play a central role in the diffusion of Pentecostal practices to the public outside the church. Apart from Pentecostals, the said public also integrates members of mainstream churches who consumed Pentecostal programs and thus come in contact with Pentecostal practices. Pentecostal ideas and forms have repercussions outside Pentecostalism due to their strong mass-mediated public presence (De Witte 2018). As beholders, non-Pentecostals are affected by Pentecostal imaginations articulated, formed and thus produced by media (Meyer 2009:7). By being molded by these imaginations which constitute Pentecostal aesthetics, these beholders become part of the Pentecostal community which is not static but remains under perpetual formation (Ibid).

The majority of Pentecostal media operating locally in Buea were created after the signing of the decree 2000/158/PM of April 3rd 2000 defining the conditions of creation and functioning of private audio-visual media in Cameroon. The first Pentecostal media to operate in Buea was the Revival Gospel Radio established in 2004 by Dr. Tembi Alfred Tembi who was a senior pastor in the Full Gospel Mission. During the period under study, the radio broadcasted on daily basis and its programs mainly consisted of Pentecostal songs. While analyzing the pentecostalization of the Presbyterian Church in Buea, Robert Akoko (2007:165) highlights the role of this pioneer radio by indicating that: "Those who cannot afford to own [Pentecostal] music set tune to the Revival Gospel Radio Station in Molyko, which is specialized in playing this type of music". The radio has then greatly contributed in making Buea inhabitants use to Pentecostal culture through music notably. Apart from music, the radio also has preaching and praying programs during which Pentecostal forms of preaching and praying are displayed and made known to non-Pentecostals. However television is more influential and determinant as far as the preaching and praying practices are concerned. By allying the sound and the image, television efficiently impacts the

viewers by showcasing Pentecostals. At the time of our field work, Buea counted two Pentecostal televisions namely Anointing TV and Ark of God TV.

The first was established in 2013 by Apostle Sonny Damian, the leader of Jesus Kingdom Embassy. Through the word “Anointing” the name of this television is expressive as far as its activities are concerned. The television has the power to anoint the viewers and help them to become born again. That is the reason why it is managed by the Anointing department which is in charge of broadcasting church services and other activities of the church such as preaching, healing, deliverance sessions, testimonies, prophecies and animation. The television functions 24 hours on daily basis.

As regards to Ark of God TV, it was inaugurated in 2014 and belongs to Ark of God Covenant Ministry which is one of the most visible Pentecostal churches in Buea in terms of followers and wealth. It is a replica of Emmanuel TV broadcasting from Nigeria in the sense that John Chi Meh who is the general overseer of the church and the founder of Ark of God TV owes his prophetic carrier from Nigeria through the mentorship of “Prophet” T.B Joshua. This indicates the influence of Nigeria on the Pentecostal media landscape of Buea. The programs of Ark of God TV are similar to those of Emmanuel TV ranging from the broadcast of Sunday church services, healing and deliverance sessions, prophesying, testimonies and the advertisement of spiritual materials such as anointing oil, anointing water and stickers. Through these programs, the viewer becomes use to Pentecostal practices that he or she can adopt through mimicry.

From the perspective of viewers, it is worth to note that the listening of Pentecostal programs does not lead automatically to a conversion to Pentecostalism. The majority of non-Pentecostal viewers that were interviewed indicated that they listen to those programs mainly by curiosity in order to see how Pentecostals perform healings. Men viewers like seeing the theatricalization and the staging of Pentecostal leaders who behave at times as actors. This explains the interest they have in programs related to healing sessions during which the performer shouts healing expressions like ‘Holy Ghost fire’ while fighting demonic spirits. Women on their part seem to be more attracted by programs related to prophecies and testimonies. Prophesying is one of the active practices of Pentecostal churches portrayed through the media. They particularly strengthen the divine abilities of the man of God who uses it to showcase the invisible and omnipotent God. As a common trait among Pentecostal media, “prophecy time” is usually programmed on Sundays –during services- and then rebroadcasted within the week. During such moments, the supplier of prophecies

usually the head of the church puts up certain spiritual gestures by taking a moment of silence listening to the voice and directives of God in the spiritual realm. In most cases, individuals are called out of the congregation where their personal past stories are exposed. The confirmation of such seeing is usually followed by echoing sounds from musical instruments (piano, jazz ban) and the rest of the congregation as they applaud to the divine ability of the man of God. As regard to testimonies, they are public recounting of spiritual experience. After a healing or a deliverance encounter, recipients of miracles are expected to expose to the public how they received their miracles by indicating their previous lives before and after healings. In some cases, people who received healing spiritually will show their test results from the hospital with the aim of confirming the power of the Holy Spirit.

In 2019, a video went viral on social media showing a 3 to 4 years child imitating a healing performance on his sister. The child was speaking like Pentecostal healers by shouting the famous ‘Holy Ghost fire’ they used to combat evil. His gestures and posture were portraying exactly what used to be shown on television. He also imitated glossolalia which is also one of the features that captures the attention of non-Pentecostal viewers. They are amazed by the ability of Pentecostals to easily jump into speaking in tongues by shaking their bodies and falling on the floor. The case of this child exemplifies the influence of Pentecostal TV programs on viewers and the mimicry attitude they have towards the practices they watch on television. It is through this mimicry that Pentecostal forms and practices have been incorporated in mainstream churches as their members started praying, singing, expressing themselves and behaving like Pentecostals.

Conclusion: Re-visiting Mainstream Christianity in Buea

It stems from the above analysis that Pentecostalism has impacted the religious landscape of Buea in terms of practices and style. Non-Pentecostal Christians attending mainstream churches had progressively adopted Pentecostal lingo, and ways of praying and singing that they discovered and got used to through Pentecostal media. These media greatly contributed in promoting the Pentecostal features to the extent that the leadership of mainstream churches decided to borrow and integrate them in their liturgy in order to avoid the exodus of their members to Pentecostalism. By doing so, these mainstream churches got involved in a pentecostalization process through which they became part of the ‘Pentecost’.

The high replication of Pentecostal practices in the public sphere by non-Pentecostals and their integration in Catholic and mainstream protestant churches impose a re-visitation of the notion of “mainstream” in the Christian ecclesiology in Buea. Is the mainstream still the mainstream? The answer to this question should take into consideration the nature of Pentecostalism which is first and foremost not a church or an organized network of institutions, but an ecumenical experience and spirituality (Young 2005). As a renewal religious movement (Wolfgang, 2011), it is characterized by specific practices and its influence is regarded from the perspective of the spread of its features. What matters is no more the number of members attending the church, but the number of people practicing Pentecostal forms. It is possible to adopt and portray the Pentecostal culture without being a member of a Pentecostal group and by attending a non-Pentecostal Church. In a context where almost all the historic churches experienced a charismatic renewal informed by Pentecostalism, the mainstream moves from the side of historicity to that of cultural hegemony. By highlighting the fact that “there are more charismatic Catholics in the world than members of the Worldwide Assemblies of God, one of the largest Pentecostal denominations”, Sarah Hinlicky (2012) denotes this hegemony which consists in the spread of Pentecostal culture in non-Pentecostal churches. By becoming global through its materiality and tangibility (Meyer 2010a), Pentecostalism is at the core of the globalization of Christianity (Dijk, 2006:104) with the spread of its sensational forms (Meyer, 2010b). With this globalization which is locally expressed in Buea, Pentecostalism as a cultural religious experience can hardly be looked upon as a religious minority in this town.

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