

Power in Neo-Pentecostalism and African Traditional Religion: A Nigerian Case Study

Jacob Oladipupo

Abstract: Pentecostalism is one of the major branches of Christianity in Nigeria that is experiencing rapid growth. One of the serious questions on it concerns the factors that have been responsible for its rapid growth. This paper investigates whether or not parity exists between the concept of power as understood by African Traditional Religion and Neo-Pentecostalism in Nigeria. First the paper identifies and discusses the conceptualization of power in ATR. Second, this paper identifies and discusses power in Neo-Pentecostalism in Africa. Third, the paper assesses the concept of power in ATR and power in Neo-Pentecostalism in order to determine whether or not parity exists between their concepts of power.

1. Introduction

The rapid growth of Pentecostal movements and their practices have been overwhelming throughout the world. The upsurge and rapid development of the movements in Nigeria is one of the crucial defining moments in the history of Nigerian Christianity. Philip Jenkins, a church historian and religious scholar, says "the rapid growth" of Pentecostal movements in Africa is happening among "non-traditional denominations that adapt Christian beliefs to local tradition."¹ Jenkins points to the impact of African culture and African Traditional Religion (ATR) on the growth of the Pentecostal movement. In agreement with Jenkins, John F. McCauley holds that "the notion of 'big man rule,' conservatively invoked to refer to a kinship-based relationship between" ruler and the ruled in secular African society, is being promoted and applied by the Pentecostal movements in Africa.² Joel B. Kalling accentuates Jenkins's position by pointing out the reasons for the rapid growth of the neo-Pentecostal movement in Africa. Kalling asserts, "Pentecostal evangelicalism offers a complete system of religious theory and practice with a unified symbolic universe to satisfy African religious longing."³ Paul Fahy notes the influence of the occult in the teachings of some charismatic leaders. In his monograph, *The Charismatic Catastrophe*, Fahy recognizes that the teachings of charismatic movements are mixed with Gnosticism, Hinduism, and magic.⁴ In addition, he claims that the Pentecostal movements have developed into a worldwide phenomenon that attracts non-Christians and deludes Christians.⁵

Asonzeh Ukah is the second religious scholar in Nigeria apart from Ojo who has paid close attention to Nigerian Neo-Pentecostalism. In his insightful work, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power, A Study of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria*, Ukah affirms that

Adeboye, who is the General Overseer of the most popular and fastest-growing Pentecostal church in Africa, appeals to the use of traditional praise chants called *oriki* in praising God for the purpose of contextualization in their worship in Yorubaland.⁶

Karin Barber and Ulli Beier agree that *oriki* is an essential cultic practice of Yoruba Traditional Religion dedicated to the reverence and veneration of deities.⁷ Beier adds that *oriki* enables the *orisa* adherents and worshippers to feel excitement, because it is an ingredient of worship to pay tribute to *orisa*.⁸ Nimi Wariboko supports Ojo and Ukah by acknowledging the cultural creativity that Pentecostal movements have brought to Nigeria. Wariboko emphasizes that Pentecostal movements in Nigeria "draw heavily from manners of effective religious practices from African Traditional Religions (ATR)."⁹ John, Ojo, Fahy, Ukah, and Nimi Wariboko confirm the perception that the births of indigenous churches in Nigeria, in March 1888 have traditional elements. According to Lamin Sanneh, "separation of native Baptists taking with them all the great African pioneers of Baptist work in Nigeria" enhances building Christian faith of the indigenous congregations from traditional beliefs and cultures.¹⁰ Nigerian Christianity has experienced a tremendous outburst during the past four decades. Neo-Pentecostalism has been the major factor in

⁶Asonzeh F. K. Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power: A Study of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2008), 323; Nimi Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism*, vol. 62 (Woodbridge, Suffolk, England: Boydell & Brewer, 2014); and Matthews A. Ojo, *The End-time Army: Charismatic Movements in Modern Nigeria* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World, 2006). Wariboko argues that Ojo was the first scholar to work on the subject of Nigerian Pentecostalism. He published his Ph.D. dissertation in 2006 as a book entitled *The End Time Army*. Ojo's monumental work traces the origin of Pentecostal-charismatic movements in Nigeria and places an emphasis on the role of university students in the 1970s Pentecostal-charismatic revival in Nigeria.

⁷Karin Barber, *The Generation of Plays: Yoruba Popular Life in the Theater* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), 341; and Ulli Beier, *The Hunter Thinks the Monkey is Not Wise: The Monkey is Wise, But He Has His Own Logic; A Selection of Essays*, vol. 59 (Bayreuth, Germany: Bayreuth University, 2001), 47.

⁸Beier, *Hunter Thinks the Monkey is Not Wise*, 46.

⁹Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism*, vol. 62 (Woodbridge, Suffolk, England: Boydell & Brewer, 2014), 2.

¹⁰Sanneh, *West African Christianity*, 174.

¹Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), 9.

²John F. McCauley, "Africa's New Big Man, Rule? Pentecostalism and Patronage in Ghana," *African Affairs* 112, no. 446 (2013): 1-21.

³Joel B. Kalling, "A New Solution to the African Christian Problem," *Missiology* 22, no. 4 (1994): 489-506.

⁴Paul Fahy, *The Charismatic Catastrophe*, accessed March 21, 2016, <http://www.understanding-ministries.com/docs/The%20Charismatic%20Catastrophe.pdf> 78.

⁵*Ibid.*, 79.

the growth of Christianity in Nigeria. Neo-Pentecostalism in Nigeria is indigenous and homegrown; her condition has paralleled global Pentecostalism during this timeframe. What is responsible for the rapid growth of Neo-Pentecostalism in Nigeria? To what extent has ATR influenced the growth of Neo-Pentecostalism in Nigeria? Did Neo-Pentecostal leaders in Nigeria affirm the old traditional beliefs and cultures in Nigeria?

This paper investigates whether congruence exist between the concept of power as understood by ATR and the Neo-Pentecostalism. First the paper identifies and discusses the conceptualization of power in ATR. Second, this paper identifies and discusses the concept of power in Neo-Pentecostalism. Third, the paper assesses the concept of power in ATR and the concept of power in Neo-Pentecostalism in order to determine whether or not homogeneity exists between their concepts of power.

The Concept of Power in African Traditional Religion

ATR is the native religion of Africa that was handed down by the progenitors of the contemporary Africans from generation-to-generation. Awolalu contends that ATR is “not a fossil religion which is a thing of the past,” but rather a religion that belongs to native Africans who live it out and exercise it.¹¹ Moreover, Awolalu adds that ATR is a religion without “written literature,” but can be seen in proverbs, songs, folktales, dancing, and liturgies.¹² The indigenous people of Africa recognize the significance of power above many things in life. In his work, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, Bolaji Idowu discloses that the African man realizes he “has been confronted with a sense of need,” and he recognizes that his unassisted power cannot handle the challenges of life, causing him to be searching for support, deliverance, and greater power for victory over enemies and environmental situations.¹³ Ojo contends, “nothing occupies the attention of Africans as much as power,” especially regarding wealth, political status, and traditional benefits.¹⁴ In the quest for power in the African indigenous society, John Mbiti argues, “the whole psychic of an atmosphere of African village is filled with belief in mystical power in ATR.”¹⁵ In *Pentecostalization: The Changing Face of Baptists in West Africa*, Arnett insists that to bring peace, prosperity, and healing in the society, amulets, sacrifices, rites, taboos, and other observances are used to counteract the powers in ATR.¹⁶ In his paper presented at the Lausanne conference, “Africa Traditional Religious System as the Basis of Understanding Christian Spiritual Warfare,” Yusufu Turaki mentions four components of ATR beliefs in mystical powers, belief in Spirit beings, belief in divinities, and belief in a Supreme Being.¹⁷

¹¹J. Omosade Awolalu, “Sin and Its Removal in African Traditional Religion,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 44, no. 2 (1976): 275-87.

¹²Ibid., 275.

¹³E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (New York: Orbis Books, 1973), 189.

¹⁴Ojo, *End-time Army*, 89.

¹⁵John S. Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* (London, SPCK, 1969), 197.

¹⁶Arnett, “Pentecostalization,” 230.

¹⁷Yusufu Turaki, “Africa Traditional Religious System as Basis of

In searching for the appropriate terminology to describe the religion of Africa, Ademola Ishola spouses a “Supreme Being as preeminent and the ultimate source of power.”¹⁸ Ikenga Methu affirms the ATR recognition of the ultimate power of God by proclaiming that Africans are convinced “that there is one Supreme God who mediates his powers through a hierarchy of subordinate deities, and in turn is approached through them.”¹⁹ John Mbiti supports the opinion of Ishola and Methu as he maintains in his work that God in ATR is all-powerful, all knowing, and all-present.²⁰

The concept of Power in the ATR worldview is different from that of the Christianity that came to Nigeria in the 1840s.²¹ Power in ATR is used for both good and evil purposes. In ATR, power is available for everyone who can tap into it. Richard Gehman shows that some of the means of tapping into power in ATR include ceremonies, rite spells, the usage of charms, and medicine.²² In his attempt to describe the relations between the powers in ATR, Laurenti argues that “lesser power” in ATR does not always relate to superior power in the sense of subservience, but in the sense of the right to be nurtured and sustained by the superior power. Laurenti asserts:

From this it becomes obvious that “power” in the African moral universe is not an abstraction: it does not exist apart from relationships. Relationships establish power and give it meaning, purpose, and specific identity. In other words, power is correctly specifically understood not as a “noun,” a state, quality, but precisely as a “verb,” an act, a dynamic reality. Further, it cannot correctly be perceived as coercive, but precisely in terms of interdependence, whereby each “power-reality” has its own independent identity, full and secure. If we apply this understanding of power to the universal elements of God, the ancestors, spirits, humanity and the world, we may appreciate its dynamic in African

Understanding Christian Spiritual Warfare” (2000), 1, accessed March 21, 2016, <http://www.lausanne.org/Brix.1>.

¹⁸Solomon Ademola Ishola, “Towards a Contextualized Missiological Approach to the Yoruba Religio-Cultural Milieu” (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1992), 113.

¹⁹Ikenga Methu, “Religious Concepts in West African Cosmogonies,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 13 (1982): 23. The first Baptist missionary to Nigeria in the 1850s, Bowen, in his correspondence also mentions the understanding of Africans about the intermediary functions of deities (*Orisa*), as those who receive petitions from man and takes it to the Supreme being (God). Cf. Thomas J. Bowen, *Adventures and Missionary Labours in Several Countries in the Interior of Africa from 1849 to 1856*, 2nd ed. (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1968), 206-07.

²⁰John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (Portsmouth, NH: 1991), 56-57.

²¹Catholic Christianity had come to Nigeria before 1840 through the Portuguese traders in 1570. It was started in Warri among the Itsekiri in western side of the Niger Delta of modern day Nigeria. Elizabeth Isichei notes that the lack of priests and hosts of other shortcomings led Christianity to ultimate extinction in the community before the 1840s. See Isichei, Elizabeth, *A history of Christianity in Africa: From antiquity to the present*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995, 61-62. In the 1840s-50s, Anglicans, Methodists, and Baptists brought Christianity to Nigeria from Europe and the United States of America.

²²Richard J. Gehman, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective* (Nairobi, East African Publishers, 2005), 88.

religion. African religion considers the existence of these realities possible only because of the power relations they share among them. God is God only because God sustains, most supremely and efficiently, the order He has put in place in the universe, which includes all the other elements. Without God's sustenance and care of this latter, God is not God.²³

Laurenti's views on the concept of power in ATR gives the impression that power can be apprehended in interactions among independent forces. This thought is supported by Boesak, who declares that power "is a relational reality that has to do with concrete relation in our socio-cultural world."²⁴ Power as an onerous virtuous obligation becomes an authority when it is properly used for service. Various kinds of mystical powers exist in ATR. Power is experienced every day in each community and city. John Mbiti confirms how Africans in their worldviews believe that magical power saturates the universe. Mbiti asserts, "The whole psychic atmosphere of African village life is filled with belief in this mystical power. African people know that the universe has power, or force."²⁵ ATR espouses several means of acquiring power. Power in ATR can be acquired through heredity, through the "calling, equipping and empowering of the medicine men from the ancestors."²⁶ In the same work, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*, Richard Gehman points out from his interviews with ATR medicine men and women that several of them came to obtain their power of medicine through inheritance from their parents, ancestors, and purchase.²⁷ In addition, Gehman mentions in his work how he interviewed a woman who had received power through the purchase of medicine.²⁸ Amulets are kinds of power purchased from medicine men for the purpose of protection. An amulet is like a talisman and a form of magic that no one inherits on account of the death of their owners, since no one fathoms how to use them. Most of the time, such objects are discarded after the death of their owners, buried with their owners, or left in the huts of their owners. Furthermore, Lindblom supports Gehman, and asserts:

It is not everyone that can be a medicine man, as a rule only those who have shown themselves predestined to this position from birth are eligible. The proof of this is that the child should be born with appendages, which constitute an indication from the ancestral spirit that he is to be a medicine man. Thus some have been born with little peg in their hand and in case of another newborn child there were found in afterbirth five small stones such as the medicine men uses in their calabashes for divination. . . . Even while

²³ Laurenti Megesa, "Power in African Religion," in *Social and Religious Concerns of East Africa: A Wajibu Anthology*, vol. 10, ed. Gerald J. Wanjohi (Nairobi, Kenya: Fotoform, 2005), 313-18.

²⁴ Allan Aubrey Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence: A Social-Ethical Study of Black Theology and Black Power* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1977), 41.

²⁵ John S. Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* (London, SPCK, 1969), 197.

²⁶ Gehman, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective...*, 293-300.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 294.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

he is growing up, the boy begins to appear different from other children. He get on well by himself and very soon has dreams and revelation by means of which he get into communication with the supernatural world.²⁹

Belief in mystical power is very crucial in ATR. Nathan Wright argues, "all men need power to become and without power life cannot become what is must be because power is basic to life."³⁰ One can use power for good or evil purposes. People with extra supernatural power in ATR acquire it through inheritance, endowment from ancestors, or purchase it from medicine men. Allan Anderson notes that "several Western observers see power in ATR as an impersonal, manipulative life force that a person can acquire or lose through various means, especially through magic."³¹ He argues that although there are a few churches where syncretism has been brought to their understanding of the Holy Spirit, the ATR concept of power is not directly transferred into the AIC churches in Africa as has been purported.³²

In his work, *Witchcraft: A Living Vice in Africa*, Kisilu Kombo argues for the existence of witchcraft in Africa and also proves that "even within the church, some adherents believe in witchcraft," and people who cannot publicly acknowledge witchcraft's existence believe it in their hearts.³³ In addition, he mentions the African belief in mystical power that cannot be explained or considered as fallacies or deception.³⁴ Mugambi reinforces the opinion of Kombo as he mentions that a spiritual person through communication in the realm of the spirit can manipulate mystical power with the ancestors and Supreme Being in ATR.

Sebald agrees that a witch in the ATR acquires power to act as the intermediary between the casualty and supernatural power. The arbitration of witches is for evil intent, namely to converse with supernatural powers in conveying tragedy, evil, fear, and death on their prey. Concerning the moral use of power, Laurenti contends, "it is an indictment of Africa's civil and religious rulers who have used power entrusted to them by their communities as an instrument of oppression, injustice, and self-promotion."³⁵ Mugambi accentuates that "the power of the Supreme Being in ATR may be under the

²⁹ Gerhard Lindblom, *The Akamba in British East Africa: An Ethnological Monograph*, vol. 17 (Appelbergsboktryckeriaktiebolag, 1920), 153. University of Toronto Archive, John M. Kelly Library, 1887-1969, accessed March 23, 2016, https://archive.org/stream/akamba_in_british_east_africa_an_ethnological_monograph/vol_17

³⁰ Nathan Wright, *Let's Work Together* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1968), 148.

³¹ Allan H. Anderson, *Moya: The Holy Spirit in an African Context* (Pretoria: Unisa Press 1991), 10.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Kisilu Kombo, "Witchcraft: A Living Vice in Africa," *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 22, no. 1 (2003): 73.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

³⁵ Magesa, Laurenti, "Power" in African religion." *Social and Religious Concerns of East Africa: A Wajibu Anthology* 10 (2005): 317.

direction of divinities.”³⁶ One is left with the question of whether powers are being used in Nigerian Neo-Pentecostalism as instruments of extortion and amassing wealth for personal gain.

The Concept of Power in Neo-Pentecostalism in Nigeria

What is Neo-Pentecostalism? Neo-Pentecostalism encompasses charismatic movements and neo-charismatic churches. “Neo-Pentecostalism is a movement that has crossed denominational boundaries, and can be found in Protestantism and Roman Catholicism alike.”³⁷ Neo-Pentecostal movements are “characterized by the manifestations in non-Pentecostal churches of what have been traditionally categorized as Pentecostal experiences.”³⁸ While some sees Neo-Pentecostals as a new movements erupting from AIC and mainline churches, this research use the term to refers to the category of churches that holds and teaches about the gifts of the Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues, spiritual warfare, prosperity and Power evangelism. The emphasis of charismatic movements on spiritual gifts, healing, speaking in tongues, power effects and prayer informs their name in Africa as Neo-Pentecostal charismatics.

Scholars of Neo-Pentecostalism and the New Religious Movements in Nigeria such as Matthews Ojo and Enoch Gbadegesin have mentioned the affinity of the Pentecostal movement with the ATR, especially in the quest for power, protection, and blessings.³⁹ In his work, *The Pentecostal Discovery of the New Testament Theme of God's Power and Its Relevance to the African Context*, P. J. Grabb asserts, “within the African context the emphasis on the miraculous power of God (the Spirit), delivering from evil and healing the sick is important.”⁴⁰ Matthews A. Ojo affirms this factor

in the fruitful Pentecostalization of Christianity in Nigeria. Ojo asserts that the Pentecostal adherents’ “obsession with power and its manifestation in every spheres of personal life reflects a deep-rooted connection to a Traditional African worldview.”⁴¹

On the same discussion of the concept of power among the Neo-Pentecostal movements in Africa, Anderson declares, “The promise of ‘power from on high’ (Luke 24:49) means that God has granted to the black person dignity, power and liberation that is realized through the Pentecostal experience.”⁴²

One of the main dynamics of Neo-Pentecostal movements in Nigeria and their ministry is the demonstration of power. This is demonstrated in the way the Neo-Pentecostals place emphasis on spiritual gifts, speaking in tongues, healings, miracles, and prophecy. Emphasis on the power gifts by Neo-Pentecostals in Nigeria face the danger of immoderation, extremism, and exclusivism. Concerning how Africans embrace Neo-Pentecostalism, Emmanuel Lartey asserts:

The success of charismatic Christianity in Africa has lain largely in its ability to propagate itself as “powerful and efficacious” in enabling people to be set free from the dangers and troubles of life. The worship and teaching of these churches have by and large been geared towards experiencing of the effective presence of the Holy Spirit. Christians have been urged and have experienced “God in their midst” in demonstrable ways. In this sense the ministries have been found relevant, vibrant and effective.⁴³

In the effort to establish the significance of the Neo-Pentecostal concept of power by Nigerians, an interview with Enoch Olujide Gbadegesin accentuates that Neo-Pentecostal movements in Nigeria believe their power is derived through endowment and that power that comes by endowment is charismatics power.⁴⁴ African Neo-Pentecostal movements largely hold the view that effective principle of the presence of the Holy Spirit is based on the expression of power. Gyadunote show incorporation of ATR ethos has been promoted by Pentecostal doctrines that hinge off the view that “biblical Christianity can be restored and that the same signs and wonders that followed the apostolic proclamation of the Gospel” could be repeated in the twenty-first century.⁴⁵ In his efforts to trace the beginning of

³⁶Jesse NdwigaKanyuaMugambi and Nicodemus Kirima, *The African Religious Heritage: A Textbook Based on Syllabus 224 of the East African Certificate of Education*(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 7.

³⁷The author of this paper find no clear distinction between traditional Pentecostal movements and some Neo-Pentecostal movements in Nigeria because they have embrace almost all the teachings of traditional Pentecostals and even are more liberal than the traditional Pentecostals. Neo-Pentecostal movements have experience rapid growth in Nigeria to the extent of crossing denominational borders. Neo-Pentecostals impacts have entered the mission-oriented churches in Nigeria, including Anglican, Methodist, and Baptist. For the influence of Pentecostal movements on the mainline denomination in Nigeria especially in Baptist, see Jacob Oladipupo “The Influence of Pentecostal and Charismatics Movements on the Nigerian Baptist Convention” (Paper presented at the class MISSN 7714 - Historical and Theological Issues in 21st Century World Christianity of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, TX, May 1, 2015.

³⁸“Neo-Pentecostalism.” *ReligionFacts.com*. 10 Nov. 2015. Web. Accessed 16 Apr. 2016. <www.religionfacts.com/neo-pentecostalism>

³⁹An Oral Interview With Enoch OlujideGbadegesin on 10th of March, 2016; Matthews A. Ojo “American Pentecostalism and the Growth of Pentecostal/Charismatic Movements in Nigeria,” in *Freedom's Distant Shores: American Protestants and the Post-Colonial Alliances with America*, ed. R. Drew Smith (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006, 155-167.

⁴⁰G. M. Sundkler Bengt, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (London:

Oxford University Press, 1948), 39-54. Ethiopianism is a movement of religious and cultural protest against the maltreatment of Africans in mainline churches.

⁴¹Mathews A. Ojo, “American Pentecostalism and the Growth of Pentecostal/Charismatic Movements in Nigeria,... 165.

⁴²Allan H. Anderson, “African Pentecostal Churches and Concepts of Power,” Selly Oak Colleges (Birmingham B29 6HQ, England), accessed March 25, 2016, http://artsweb.bham.ac.uk/aanderson/Publications/apcs_and_concepts_of_power.htm.

⁴³Emmanuel Lartey, “Of Formulae, Fear and Faith: Current Issues of Concern for Pastoral Care in Africa,” *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology* 11: (2001):5-13.

⁴⁴Enoch OlujideGbadegesin, personal interview with the writer, March 10, 2016.

⁴⁵Asamoah-Gyadu, J. Kwabena *African Charismatics: Current Developments Within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in*

African independent churches, which were the precursors of Neo-Pentecostal movements in Africa, Lamin Sanneh argues that the churches in West Africa took up “administrative independence “from the mainline and mission oriented churches and “ritual adaptation” from the pre-Christian religion.⁴⁶

In addition, Sanneh notes that the attempt of Neo-Pentecostal charismatic movements to seek a unique “mediation of the Spirit has caused them to engage in the process that enhances the importance of ATR to strengthen their Christian spirituality.”⁴⁷ Brigit Meyer reinforces Sanneh’s opinion when he underscores that Pentecostal movements in Africa “mediate between Ewe traditional religion and mission churches.”⁴⁸ Meyer’s work reflects the reasons Neo-Pentecostalism has been prevalent in Africa. According to Meyer, Neo-Pentecostals thrive in Africa because “it offers ritual space and an imaginary language to deal with the demons that are cast out” in the course of modernity, and which continue to hunt people when they try to progress.⁴⁹ Conforming to the perception of the adherents of Neo-Pentecostal movements in Africa, Asamoah-Gyadu argues that *Sunsum sore*, which is one of the traditional religions in Ghana, did not actually subsidize Ghanaian Christianity, but is essentially “regarded as being, [the]primarily, contextual expressions of what they perceived as biblical and Pentecostal Christianity.”⁵⁰

The coherence of some of the teachings of Neo-Pentecostal movements with the ATR is the efforts to meet necessary needs. In his attempt to offer an explanation for the rapid growth of Neo-Pentecostal movements in Ghana, Paul Gifford says that the movement flourishes because of the “claim to have the answers to Ghanaians’ existential problems and especially to their most pressing existential problem, economic survival.”⁵¹ In order to explain Neo-Pentecostal power and influence in the politics of Nigeria, Nkem Osuigwe calls attention to how Neo-Pentecostal movements in Nigeria attempt to spiritualize the politics of the nation as he asserts:

[T]he newer churches [Neo-Pentecostals] spiritualize politics by way of “spiritual causality” which manifests in three ways: an “enchanted approach” whereby demons, whose origin is seen in African Traditional Religion, are seen as being responsible for the political situation; hence their spiritual power must be broken; and the biblical understanding, which has 2 Chron. 7:14 as key text and which believes that “the national plight is caused by apostasy, particularly failure to worship God properly on the

part of the leader.”⁵²

This attempt of Neo-Pentecostal leaders has caused the movements’ leaders to place the blame of nationwide predicament on apostasy and unbelief of Nigeria’s political leaders.

Ojo accentuates how Neo-Pentecostal movements in Africa have been confronting age-long indispensable issues, such as an emphasis on healing, security, power, and the spirit world indicates the continuity of African cosmology.⁵³ He adds that Pentecostal movements in Africa have become the symbols of change and transformation of worldviews and relationship in African society.⁵⁴

Gbadegesin accentuates the crucial place of power in relation to ATR and Pentecostal movements in Nigeria. He points out that power comes as a result of charisma and baptism of the Holy Spirit among the Pentecostal churches.⁵⁵ In addition, people with power command honor either in ATR or Pentecostal movements. The concept of power plays significant roles, but the demarcation is that the concept of power in the Pentecostal movement is cleaner in Nigeria than that of ATR. On account of the similarities of some elements of worship and ritual, drumming and singing loud, Gbadegesin agrees that elements of syncretism are present among the Pentecostal movements in Nigeria and ATR.⁵⁶

One of the issues against African Neo-Pentecostalism, especially the Nigeria Neo-Pentecostal movement, is their emphasis on power and prayer against the devil, and prayers for prosperity and physical healing at the expense of neglecting the teachings and theology of the cross of Christ. Christianity that focuses only on power against the kingdom of darkness, obtaining blessings, and escaping the challenges of life needs a balanced theology. Pentecostals in Nigeria must embrace the theology of perseverance in the time of difficulties, failures, and hardship, when it appears there is no radar of noticeable success in the Christian journey.

Assessment of the Concept of Power in ATR and in Neo-Pentecostalism

The present study has presented the views of power in ATR and Neo-Pentecostalism. The first section shows that ATR adherents believe that power plays a major role in the pre-Christian religion. The second section demonstrated the dimension of Neo-Pentecostal understanding of the concepts of power. This section will assess both ATR and Neo-Pentecostal concept of power so as to determine the congruence between their views.

Ghana (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 37.

⁴⁶Sanneh, *West African Christianity*, 180.

⁴⁷Ibid., 180.

⁴⁸Brigit Meyer, *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity among the Ewe in Ghana*, vol. 21 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 173.

⁴⁹Ibid., 216.

⁵⁰Asamoah-Gyadu, J. Kwabena. *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* ..., 37.

⁵¹Paul Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), viii-ix.

⁵²Nkem Emerald Osuigwe, “Crude Oil, Conflict and Christian Witness in Nigeria: Baptist and Pentecostal Perspectives” (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 2010), 59.

⁵³Matthews Ojo, “Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements in Modern Africa,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to African Religions*, vol. 58, ed. Elias Kifon Bongmba (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 295-309.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵See Appendix, Interview, Enoch Gbadegesin, Interview with the author on Phone at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, March 10, 2016.

⁵⁶Ibid.

The African Independent Churches in Nigeria (AIC) that eventually became the precursors of African Neo-Pentecostalism seceded from Baptist, Anglican, and Methodist mission churches in Africa beginning from 1888 on account of the tussle “for prestige and power.”⁵⁷ This observation suggests the pre-Christian roots of Pentecostalism in Nigeria and the search for power. In his view of the history of African Christianity, Andrew Walls declares, “African Christianity is a new development of African religion, shaped by the parameters of pre-Christian African religion as the Christianity of the Jerusalem Church of the Acts of the Apostles was rooted in the religion of old Israel.”⁵⁸ Allan Anderson emphasizes the relationship between the concept of power in the ATR and Neo-Pentecostalism when he asserts: “This biblical message of the power of the Spirit finds familiar ground among African people, and is possibly one of the main reasons for the rapid growth of Pentecostal churches.”⁵⁹ In an attempt to prove the point that African comprehension of worship, as conveyed in the ATR, compels a Christian system of worship in Nigeria, Osadolor Imasogie asserts that “man’s self-expression of his experience is colored by self-understanding, symbols, language, thought pattern and forms through which he expresses them, be they physical or spiritual.”⁶⁰ Additionally, one may ask whether the magical powers meant for invoking the presence of the Supreme Being through divinities and spirits in ATR only serve the purpose of waking the worshippers to spiritual alertness to the attendance of a supreme being and divinities for easy discernment and annexation.

A clear answer to the above question will aid an understanding of the differences and similarities of the concept and purpose of power between ATR and Neo-Pentecostalism in Nigeria. In his article, “African Independent Church Pneumatology and the Salvation of all Creation,” M. L. Daneel declares that there is a replication of obsession with healing in prophetic churches in Africa.⁶¹ Additionally, Daneel states that “a scrutiny of the diagnosis and therapy of the prophetic healers reveal that both are parallel with and deviate from traditional divination and practices.”⁶² The affinity between the prophetic churches and Traditional Religion of Africa raises the question of the relationship between the contextualization of Christianity and the African orientation of life. Pre-Christian religion in Africa, which is characterized by divination, healing, soothsaying, magic, and medicine, is similar to Neo-Pentecostalism with regard to the latter’s doctrine of power gifts, speaking in tongues, prophecy, healings, and miracles.

In his discussion of the reason for the rapid growth of Neo-Pentecostalism in Africa, Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi says the main significant explanation is that “Pentecostalism has found a fertile ground in the all-pervasive primal religious traditions, especially in its cosmology and in its concept of salvation.”⁶³ Peter Ropo Awoniyi argues concerning New Religious Movements (NRM) including Neo-Pentecostal churches in southwestern Nigeria that, “new religious movements in Christianity have danced to the tune of Yoruba indigenous spirituality and was rebranded by it.”⁶⁴ Nevertheless, the rise of Neo-Pentecostalism has allowed incorporation of some of the ATR worldview into Christianity in Nigeria. J.K. Phiri’s work buttresses the relationship between Neo-Pentecostalism in Africa and ATR by affirming that “African traditional spirituality” must be taken into cognizance for proper understanding of “African Christian spirituality,” most especially in African Neo-Pentecostal churches.⁶⁵ Johan Cilliers strengthens Phiri’s thought on African spirituality when he insists, “It is impossible to even begin to talk about African *Christian* spirituality without attempting to say something about *African* spirituality.”⁶⁶ Afe Adogame, a Nigerian and religious studies professor at the University of Edinburgh, argues, “One main thrust of African Pentecostal religiosity is the preponderance of deliverance and spiritual warfare rituals in their cosmological tradition.”⁶⁷

One may raise the question as to whether Neo-Pentecostal influence and its relationship with ATR is peculiar to the Pentecostal movement in the African experience. In *Sisters in the Wilderness, the Challenge of Womanist God-talk*, Dolores Williams argues that black spiritual churches in the United States stress the significance of the Spirit, which originates from their concept of God as Spirit.⁶⁸ Additionally, Paul Fahy underlines the truth that Azusa Street that focused on holiness, commenced by Parham, the events that are related to the black race involvement at the beginning of Pentecostalism.⁶⁹ In addition, “the meetings had a worship style that was based on the African-American tradition which developed out of the slavery experience of

⁵⁷Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact* (New York: Orbis Books, 1983), 174.

⁵⁸Andrew F. Walls, “African Christianity in the History of Religions,” *Studies in World Christianity* 2, no. 2 (1996): 183.

⁵⁹Allan H. Anderson, “The Gospel and African Religion,” *International Review of Mission* 89, no. 354 (2000): 377.

⁶⁰Osadolor Imasogie, “The Influence of African Traditional Religious Ideas of Worship on the Christian Worship Practices in Nigeria,” *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* 6 (1991): 17-23.

⁶¹M. L. Daneel, “African Independent Church Pneumatology and the Salvation of All Creation,” *International Review of Mission* 82, no. 326 (1993): 150.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi, “The Nature of Continuity and Discontinuity of Ghana Pentecostal Concept of Salvation in African Cosmology,” *Cyber Journal of Pentecostal and Charismatic Research* 10, accessed March 20, 2016, www.pctii.org/cyber/larbi.html.

⁶⁴Peter Olufiropo Awoniyi, “Yoruba Indigenous Spirituality and the Reshaping of New Religious Movements in South-west Nigeria,” *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* 16, no. 1 (2011): 161.

⁶⁵Jason Kelvin Phiri, “African Pentecostal Spirituality: A Study of the Emerging African Pentecostal Churches in Zambia” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pretoria, 2009), 82-83.

⁶⁶J. H. Cilliers, “Formations and Movements of Christian Spirituality in Urban African Contexts,” in *Conference Interkulturelle Religionshermeneutik – Das Verstehen des Fremden, Religion und Politik in Afrika*, vol. 10 (Berlin: Humboldt University, 2008), 1.

⁶⁷Adogame Afe, “Dealing with Local Satanic Technology: Deliverance Rhetoric in the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries,” *Journal of World Christianity* 5, no. 1 (2012): 75-101.

⁶⁸Dolores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 221.

⁶⁹Paul Fahy, *Origins of Pentecostalism and Charismatic Movements* (Columbus, OH: Understanding Ministries, 1998), 43.

the South.”⁷⁰Black music types, and particularly expressive praise that included shouting characterized the worship of this movement: “Screaming and dancing in addition to speaking in tongues attracted the poor working class people in America.”⁷¹

One of the main challenges threatening African Christianity especially Neo-Pentecostal movements in the twenty-first century is the shared allegiance of Christian adherents between ATR and Christianity. Williamson and Smith assert:

After almost a century of the preaching on the Christian gospel and the establishment of Christian congregations, traditional religion shows an astonishing power of survival and rejuvenation. Outside the church, the Abosom shrines have been adopted to new ends, the drinking medicine cults have a wide vogue, the faith-healing sects effect a working compromise between Christian ideas and African custom and within the church, the background thought world still operates.⁷²

Bolaji Idowu, one of notable Nigerian Religious scholars, also alludes to the fact that, in times of personal difficulties concerning the ways of life, many Africans consider ATR as the final assistance. Bolaji Idowu asserts:

It is well known that in strictly personal matters relating to passages of life and the crisis of life, Africans in hospitals, for example, people who on admission, have declared themselves Christians, and indeed are “practicing” Christians, have medicine prepared in the traditional way smuggled in to them simply because psychologically at least, that is consecrated medicine with the touch of the divine healer, in contrast to the Europeans’ mere “coloured water.”—In matters concerning providence, healing, and general well-being, therefore Africans still look up to their own religion “as the way.”⁷³

In his work, *Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria*, Musa Gaiya alludes to the nature of Neo-Pentecostalism in Nigeria when he states they are not uniform in nature, because some Neo-Pentecostals in Nigeria “are conservative; some are innovative while some are syncretic.”⁷⁴ Observation of Gaiya shed light to the fact that it is not proper to generalize that all Neo-Pentecostal denominations in Nigeria are syncretistic in nature. Ukpong agrees with Gaiya on the typology of Nigerian Neo-Pentecostalism by insisting that the classification of Pentecostal movements in Nigeria shows

that one cannot comprehend Neo-Pentecostalism in the nation one-sidedly because its nature is not standardized.⁷⁵ Jacob K. Olupona asserts:

There is continuity between prophetic African churches and the Pentecostal-charismatics. Both churches are engaged in what we could term the African primal quest for the sacred and the transcended: the quest for healing, well-being, material success, and long life. Both establish some degree of religious independence in that, unlike the mission churches before them, they are not under larger foreign mission. Both groups of churches also derive their success from their appeal, however unacknowledged, to African spiritual sensibilities. For example, African prophetic churches and Pentecostal-charismatic churches, while both condemning African ritual practices such as divination, ancestor veneration, traditional medicine, and healing, paradoxically share other aspects of indigenous orientation, such as visions, dreams, healing, “spirit” possession, and divine revelation.⁷⁶

Olujide Gbadegesin affirms the observation of Olupona, as he declares in an interview that elements of syncretism exist among some of the Neo-Pentecostal denominations in Nigeria, but some of them seriously uphold the evangelical position.⁷⁷ Jegede notes that many people in Africa embrace Christianity, but several of them in Africa are still tied to their pre-Christian religious background.⁷⁸ Williamson and Smith insist that turning to fetish by those who claim to embrace Christianity on account of fears and their old beliefs in ATR is a sign that such people have not been completely delivered from their old philosophies and explanations to life and experience.⁷⁹

Ayuk mentions some major problems of Neo-Pentecostal movements in Nigeria, including hostility to social contexts and limited accountability, in addition to his attribution of syncretism among the Neo-Pentecostal movements in Nigeria to the lack of proper theological training among their ministers.⁸⁰ The African Christian difficulty results from when traditional African spirituality meets the Christian message that is preached from a Western worldview and from the principle of accepting reason as the supreme

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid., 248.

⁷³Idowu, *African Traditional Religion*, 206.

⁷⁴Musa A. B. Gaiya, *The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria* (Copenhagen: Centre for African Studies, University of Copenhagen, 2002), 10.

⁷⁵Donatus Pius Ukpong, “The Presence and Impact of Pentecostalism in Nigeria” (2006): 20, accessed March 21, 2016, www.glopent.net/.../presence-and-impact-of-Pentecostalism-in-Nigeria.20.

⁷⁶Jacob K. Olupona, “Africa, West,” in *New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. van der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 12.

⁷⁷Gbadegesin, see Appendix Interview, March 10, 2016.

⁷⁸Gbenga G. Jegede, “Academic Works on the History, Growth and Development of Christianity in Africa: A Retrospective and Perspective Appraisal,” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 3, no. 1 (January 2013): 213.

⁷⁹S. G. Williamson and N. Smith, *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith* (London: SCM Press, 1965), 82.

⁸⁰Ayuk Asaji, “The Pentecostal Transformation of Nigerian Church Life,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 5, no. 2 (2002): 189-204.

authority in matters of opinion. John Pobee and Gabriel Ositelu point out that Christians still attend to ATR, because the western God brought by Christianity is considered inadequate. Pobee and Ositelu assert:

The Western God was spiritually inadequate and irrelevant to deal with the reality of many aspects of our lives. The result was a Christian faith and conviction, which were only “skin-deep” or superstitious, in spite of the successful spread of Christianity on the continent. There was and is still the question of how deep the Christian faith really is when so many of its affiliates still continue to visit the caretakers of the African Traditional Religion.⁸¹

The arguments of several Neo-Pentecostal scholars cited in this work have confirmed the presence of congruence between Neo-Pentecostalism and ATR especially on the matters related to the concept of power. The suspicion of the relationship between Neo-Pentecostalism and ATR in Nigeria ranges from the typology of Neo-Pentecostal movements in Nigeria, neutral statements from scholars, and the thought of syncretism. In his discussion of syncretism as the problem of the church, Ayuk asserts:

Occultists are now hiding under the cover of Pentecostals. It is true that the Pentecostals are already dealing with this problem within the Christian circle, but how about those who are using miraculous (magic) power to attract people to worship false gods or the devil in short? Is this our problem? Well, what I think we can do is to continue preaching the word of God to crystallize the devil’s power over the innocent.⁸²

One of the responses of Neo-Pentecostal movements in Nigeria to syncretism is that diversities exist in the Neo-Pentecostal denomination, which cause some churches among the denomination to be syncretistic in nature and some to uphold true biblical principles.

Ukpong notes that some Neo-Pentecostal movements, such as Deeper Life Bible Church, hold to the evangelical view of the Scriptures and emphasize holiness and sanctification; some focus on healing, faith, and prosperity, while others use occultist powers.⁸³ In his attempt to categorize Pentecostal movements in Africa, Anderson claims that all the African independent churches that serve as precursors of Neo-Pentecostalism are part of Pentecostal movements. Anderson asserts: “‘prophet-healing’ and ‘Spirit’ or ‘spiritual’ African Instituted Churches (AICs), as well as other Pentecostal and charismatic churches, both new and

older varieties, are all different expressions of Pentecostalism in Africa.”⁸⁴

Andrew Walls says that the concept of Christianity in Africa is shaped by pre-Christian religion, one may contend that is an overstatement with critical errors, because he was writing generally about world Christianity and not specifically on Nigerian Neo-Pentecostalism. Ayuk declares that some Neo-Pentecostal movement leaders are using magic powers to attract people, making it easy to trust the reality of syncretism.⁸⁵

Ayuk’s observation is a convincing one because he was writing as an insider. ATR is an important religion—not only in Nigeria—but also in Africa. Rosalind J. Hackett demonstrates the influence of ATR on other Christian denominations in Africa, such as the Celestial Church of Christ in Nigeria. Hackett insists as follows:

Liturgy draws on both traditional and modern elements incorporating and Christianizing such important Yoruba Traditions as the naming ceremony and New Moon Service. Ritual Practices cater for traditional customs such as the taboos concerning women as well as more modern fears and needs in the form of sanctification for motor vehicles and special prayers for all drivers or travellers.⁸⁶

In support of Hackett on the influence of ATR on African culture and lifestyles, Julius MutugiGatho suggests ATR is an indigenous system of beliefs of Africa that is assimilated into its cultures and ethos.⁸⁷ In addition, Osadolor Imasogie insists on the influence of the ATR concept of worship on some AIC churches as he insists, “As in African Traditional Religious Worship, public worship in these churches is also characterized by spontaneous singing of choruses, clapping of hands, and dancing which make their worship services lively and attractive.” [Imasogie, “Influence of African Traditional Religious Ideas,” 23] Since it has been proved that congruence exists between ATR and African Independent Churches (AIC) such as the Garrick Sokair Braide Movements, the Celestial Church of Christ and others, which are the precursors of Neo-Pentecostal Movements in Nigeria, it is reasonable to agree that a relationship on the concept of power exists to a certain degree between Neo-Pentecostal movements and ATR in Nigeria.

2. Conclusion

This research has examined the phenomenon of power in Nigerian Neo-Pentecostalism and ATR. The study has determined that there is congruence between the concept of power in ATR and Neo-Pentecostalism that leads to the

⁸¹John S. Pobee and Gabriel Ositelu II, *African Initiatives in Christianity: The Growth, Gifts and Diversities of Indigenous African Churches: A Challenge to the Ecumenical Movement*, no. 83 (World Council of Churches, 1998), 68.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ukpong, “Presence and Impact of Pentecostalism in Nigeria,” 15-20.

⁸⁴Anderson, “Gospel and African Religion,” 373.

⁸⁵Walls, “African Christianity,” 183; and Ausaji, “Pentecostal Transformation,” 189-204.

⁸⁶Rosalind I. J. Hackett, “Thirty Years of Growth and Change in a West African Independent Church: A Sociological Perspective,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* (1980): 218.

⁸⁷Julius MutugiGathogo, “The Relevance and Influence of African Religion in Post Apartheid South Africa and Beyond, Part 1,” *Churchman (London)* (Summer 2007), 164.

rapid growth of Neo-Pentecostalism in Nigeria. Neo-Pentecostal movements in Nigeria reflect the response of indigenous people to Christianity when the religion crossed over from the West to Africa. In the findings, it was also discovered that affinity between Neo-Pentecostalism and ATR is not restrained to Nigeria as a country in the continent, but to all over the Africa where Neo-Pentecostalism touches the indigenous religion. Similarity of Neo-Pentecostalism and ATR as syncretism is a possible topic of debate among the Pentecostal scholars especially in Nigeria for further research.

The investigation shows that one of the reasons for rapid growth of Neo-Pentecostalism in Nigeria is due to the semblance and connectivity to ATR mindset. Neo-Pentecostalism in Nigeria has redefined evangelical Christianity in terms of its emphasis in churches especially on prosperity. African Spiritism has come to the church through the backdoor of ATR because of Neo-Pentecostal affinity with traditional religion in Nigeria. ATR practices are not the only force in the rapid growth and development of Neo-Pentecostalism in Africa, especially in Nigeria, but some of its indigenous religious cultural elements have contributed their own quota. It has also been discovered that Neo-Pentecostalism contributed immensely to the religious, social, political, and economic situation of Nigeria. Neo-Pentecostalism has manifested the genuine, authentic, and vibrant imprint of the ATR cultural peculiarities of Africa.

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Author Profile

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