



Anglican Fasting and Prayer Society and Development of Christianity in Urhobo, 1990-2017

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Abstract: The emergence of charismatic groups in mainline churches has infused new worship life and increase in membership and structure. The historiography of Anglican Fasting and Prayer Society, examined the characteristics and impact of the movement to the development of the Christian faith in Urhobo between 1990 and 2017. The functional theory which stressed on the role of religion in the society was adopted. Historical, phenomenological, participant observation, and oral interview methods were applied. Data were drawn from primary and secondary source to allow for unbiased analysis of findings. The movement, has affected the worship life of members which has led to the speedy growth and development of Anglican churches in Warri, Ughelli, and Sapele Dioceses. The rift between some leaders of the movement and authorities of the Anglican Church occasioned the founding of new churches which has expanded the Christian landscape in Urhobo. Wittingly or unwittingly, the movement has become a breeding ground for charismatic leaders and church founders in the area. The paper recommended for the sustenance of the movement; appointment of chaplains to each branch of AFPS and establishment of theological institution to empower members and promote balanced growth of the church. Further in-depth research on the churches that emerged from the movement will enrich our understanding of growth pattern of new generation churches in the Niger Delta, Nigeria, and Africa by extension.

Keywords: Charismatic, Church development, Leadership, Revivalism, and Worship.

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INTRODUCTION

The church has always witnessed the breaking forth or outburst of charismatic movements whose members claimed to be specially imbued by the Holy Spirit. Christian worship was started in Urhobo in the late nineteenth century by some liberated slaves. The church was organised by Bishop James Johnson in the twentieth century, and expanded through the efforts of native evangelists. This opened the window for local congregations to be identified with certain individuals. It was not strange to have charismatic movement in Anglican

churches in the area identified with key individuals. In the examination of the activities and contributions of Anglican fasting and prayer society (AFPS) to the expansion of Christianity in Urhobo of Nigeria Delta, Nigeria, the functional theory was adopted as it emphasised on the role of religion in the society.

Data were drawn from oral interviews with some actors and observers in the drama, and related books, journals, synodal reports, and other church documents. Discussions, field trips and personal

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observations helped to strengthen the sources. Discussion focused on the formation, characteristics and impact of AFPS to the growth of Christianity in Urhobo.

Foundation of Anglican Fasting and Prayer Society (AFPS)

The Anglican Fasting and Prayer Society (AFPS) started as "Anglican Mimeyeraye Fasting and Prayer Society" (AMFPS) in the 1980s with a group of persons led by Daniel D. Mimeyeraye. They met every Friday at St Andrew's Cathedral, Warri to fast and pray. Among those who started the prayer band group that metamorphosed into a charismatic movement were Johnson Ivukiwhiaye (now Ivukevweraye), Evang S.U Ayanyen, Evang. M. Mufia and others. As Evang. F. Asama (13/4/2018, oral interview) revealed that the group began fasting and praying fervently every Friday from 10am till 5pm for the church and success of evangelistic campaigns of Anglican Adam Preaching Society (AAPS). Gradually, they started experiencing manifestation of the power of God, members of the Cathedral and other churches started joining them. Many who attended their prayer meetings went home with testimonies of healing and deliverance.

The group was formally constituted on July 13, 1984 at St. Andrew's Cathedral, Warri. In 1987, they acquired a piece of land at Okumagba layout of Warri and moved the in prayer and fasting meetings to the site which became their headquarters. One reason for leaving the Cathedral was because the leader, Mimeyeraye was not fluent in English language and uses Urhobo language as medium of communication and operation. No wonder, till date, the church that the founded uses Urhobo language for worship.

When they witnessed numerical growth with accompanying miracles, signs and wonders, they sought for official recognition from then Bishop of Warri Diocese Right Reverend John Dafiewhare, At the 1990 Synod held at St Andrew's Cathedral, the Bishop christened the group; "Anglican Mimeyeraye Fasting and Prayer Society" (AMFPS). He saw in Mimeyeraye another Adam Igbudu, who will do greater works and cause revivalism in Urhobo Anglican churches and beyond as many acknowledged that his charismatic character was approved from heaven with visible signs and wonders. However, when Mimeyeraye left the Anglican Church on November 15, 1993 to start another church, the movement was renamed, "Anglican Fasting and Prayer Society" (AFPS).

The five objectives of AFPS are: to enable members to realize the effectiveness of prayers coupled with fasting; to pray for the sick and needy

who are willing to be Christians; members are to fast and pray every Friday throughout the year; to inculcate in our families and the members of the church the idea of living a holy life; and to heal the sick, cast out demons and preach the gospel and thereby revive the church. The pioneer executives officers were Evangelist D.D Mimeyeraye (founder and leader); Evang. J.O Ivikiwhiaye (Assistant leader); Evang. M. E Okome (General Secretary); Evang. J. E.W. Omogoisibo (Assistant General Secretary); and Evang. S.U Ayanye (Treasurer). Other executive members (Evangelists) included; E.G Amreketa, J.O Okorodudu, M. Umufia, D. Diabeta, J. Okoloko, J. Okugbe, P. Filaba, A. P. Ogigi, S. Orhuerakpor, Mrs Mary Kakpo, Mrs Angelina Orhuerakpor, and Mrs Victoria Ekpobuvie. The pioneer treasurer, Evang S.U Ayanyen succeeded the foundation leader. He too, left the church, and Evangelist B. O. Okotete became the current National President of AFPS.

Crusades and Revivals

The primary, greatest, and grand means in missionary strategy is evangelism and preaching of the Gospel accompanied by teaching. The Great Commission says; "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matt 28:19-20). Mark 16:15 reads; "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature". The AFPS started in 2009, organising indoor revival programmes and advanced to open-air evangelistic crusades held annually on third Wednesday (being Super Wednesday) in September. They also had annual "Healing Campaign" and "Holy Ghost Festival". Through these, they were able to take the Gospel from Eruemukowharie to Kokori, Oghara, Ovorie, Opheren in Agbarha-Otor and Adagbrasa in Okpe clan of Urhobo in Delta State.

Worship

Speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*), prophecy/vision which is a fulfilment of God's promise in Joel 2:28 is worship normal for AFPS. Although Nigeria Anglicanism seemed to be indifferent to these charismatic phenomena at a time in her history, from 1970s and 1980s, speaking in tongues, prophecy/visions have characterised the lives and ministries of most charismatic groups and personnel in the Church. Though the fire of revivalism which birthed the later manifestations of these charismatic gifts was set during the first and second decade of the 20th century as A. Anderson (2004) observed that, spiritual gifts (including *glossolalia*) had been experienced in Church of England from 1907-25 as well as Anglican African healing and prophetic movements in South Africa in the 1940s.

In Nigeria, it is contended that as early as 1916, revival prayer meetings which emphasised baptism of the Holy Spirit was held at St. Paul's church, Breadfruit Street, Lagos under the foremost charismatic bishop James Johnson (Ukachi, 2013). It is probable that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit baptism-speaking and interpreting of tongues, prophecy, healing, and working of miracles which James Johnson encouraged and taught at Breadfruit Street church, may have been passed on to the likes of Masima Ebosa when he (Johnson) visited Urhobo for mission work between 1901 and 1917. When Ebosa started the *Ishoshi Erhi* movement, he and his followers, claimed to be in full possession of the Holy Spirit as the movement was characterised by ravings and orgiastic display in the form of speaking in tongues and prophetic manifestations (Erivwo, 1979).

Inspirational songs is another component of their worship. The scripture said; "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col 3:16). They used inspirational songs and motivational talks as against traditional hymn singing and homily. This are aspects of revolutionary changes in Nigerian charismatic music occasioned by reasoning ability and adventurous/insatiable nature of man that leads to unending education, modernity and civilization. Again, religiously, politically, culturally, socially or technologically, all facets of the Nigerian life is experiencing change, as the contemporary times are full of inventions and discovery which made all orthodox practices and methods boring and unacceptable to modern people. In same vein, church music and mode of gospel sermonisation of the 1960s/1970s and contemporary times are classified as 'ancient' and 'modern' respectively.

They feature gospel artists and motivational ministers add colour and glamour to attract members to their meetings. Some of them are Rev (Dr) Charles Apoki, Evang. Festus Iduh, Pastor Samson Bodjor, Bishop Praise Omoleku, and J. Aruakpor. They apply few Bible verses to salt their messages with humour and learned eloquence or gifted oratory; tell many stories to sway through their listener's emotions, pop up their psychology, and build their self-esteem. They promise their gullible admirers unprecedented miracles, financial and other advantages, divine health, and all earthly pleasures. Their major weakness is the calculated conscious attempt not to say things that might offend their audience, and tend to be man-centred and people-pleasing in their messages. They scarcely preach about the reality of hell and God's impending judgment and punishment on sinners.

Prior to 1980s, Christian worship music was characterised by restraint, tranquillity, nobility and solemnity as they were sung from hymns with organ or piano as inherited from missionaries. Preaching and teaching of the Bible were also solemn as the ministers were taught at seminaries to prepare and deliver sermons with brevity and in a moralizing format. The "solemnity" during worship was also responsible for the exodus of members especially youths from mainline churches to the Pentecostal and African Instituted Churches. According to Nabofa,

This may be one of the reasons why those who are converted from the traditional religion into any of the mainline Christian denominations do not feel at ease as much as they would have done in the Pentecostal churches whose mode of worship is saturated with singing, clapping and dancing. Thus, dancing is one of the methods of advertising and propagating religion... It is through music, singing and dancing that the Urhobo mostly express his inner religious experiences and feelings. This is his favourable medium for communicating with the divine. To him dance is not a luxury; it is a necessity because it is the physical manifestation of his mystical experience (1990, p. 21-22).

The average Urhobo person loves to sing and dance in worship and adoration of Oghene-creator and sustainer of the universe. Thus, prior to the popularisation, modernisation or revolution of Christian music in Nigeria, the AFPS, were known in Urhobo, Isoko and other parts of Nigeria for the use of inspirational traditional Urhobo and Isoko Christian songs, *Ineromesaso* or *Kirimomo* (native airs) coupled with clapping and dancing (a combination of *Udje* and *Ikpeba* dance steps) in their evangelistic campaigns. The Urhobo hymnal, a combination of hymns selected from the Sacred Songs and Solos, the Hymnal Companion, the Ancient and Modern, and some compositions of native lyrics have been perfectly Urhobonised by the Anglican Youth Fellowship (AYF) and AFPS. During evangelistic campaigns, people are attracted to their meetings, and converts won en mass to the glory of God. The inspirational songs and captivating dance steps are spiced with cohesive clapping of hands and motivational preaching and teaching of the undiluted word of God.

Warfare Prayers and Exorcism

In Urhobo cosmology, there are powers and spiritual beings believed to be in control of the material world, namely; *Oghene* (Almighty God), *Erhan and Edjo* (divinities and spirits or nature gods and goddesses) and *Erivwin* (abode of the ancestors). Since *Oghene* (Almighty God and Creator of the universe) live far away in the sky, He has

detached Himself from the affairs of humankind and allowed the *Erhan, Edjo and Eriwvin* to be in charge (Badawusi, 2016). Rather than worship *Oghene*, they people go through the divinities, spirits and ancestors whom they believe directly involved in daily human affairs. Besides, "among the Urhobo, witchcraft is believed to be real and cannot be wished away. It is dreaded....the reality of witchcraft is greatly attested to by the revelation of priests, diviners and the many voluntary confessions made by members" (Nabofa, 1979, p.229). These myriads of spirits or divinities have wrecked-havoc in the lives of average Urhobo. No wonder, the evangelists who are gifted in exorcism often demand that every Christian undergo deliverance through warfare prayers. In Ughelli and Urhobo, the AFPS and other charismatic movements thus narrow their prayers to the nefarious activities of these spirits. Adherents coloured their prayers during indoor or outdoor crusades, revivals and prayer meetings by singing and shouting; 'My Father, my Father' and 'Oh God arise...'

At St. Paul's church Eketete for instance, the group leader (*Osun*), Evang. (Dr) B. O. Okotete held annual All Night Prayers, "War against spiritual wickedness" every day of August. Evang. F. K. Usenu, leader and founder of Anglican Deliverance Ministry (A prayer arm of AAPS) at St. Matthias' church, Agbarha-Otor held warfare prayers which attracted people from far and near places scrabbling for available seats in the auditorium and adjoined canopies in expectation of deliverance from evil powers. Every Wednesday between 10:00am and 4:00pm is observed as fasting and prayer in Ughelli Diocese where members and non-members meet at various centres to wage war against all evil scheming and attacks. Nabofa opined that; "Nigeria Pentecostals today foreground 'battling witchcraft' as the basis of their religious mission" (1979, p 308). These seem to strengthen public and private worship prayers taught by missionaries that centred on salvation, sanctification, steadfastness in faith, and reigning with Christ in heaven. Diara and Onah (2014) added that, people are generally captivated and spiritually motivated when they see extraordinary things such as speaking in tongues, healing and deliverance ministrations, prophecy and vision among others in churches. These convinced them that something is happening in such churches, and they are encouraged to stay on. Where the opposite was the case, there was the tendency to leave for another church.

Counselling

This is the provision of professional assistance and guidance using scriptural truth in resolving personal or psychological problems of members and non-members. It avails opportunity

for leaders (counsellors) to conduct in-depth evaluation of problems. It involves one-on-one interaction (questions and answers) between the counsellor and counselees on diverse issues of life. It is held on special days at different branches and at specific locations. Ekiugbo branch for instance, is on Tuesdays at 7am, many people from far and near go on time as to get numbers before commencement.

Some counselling end in further appointments accompanied with personal fasting and deliverance. Jesus himself said; "However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting" (Matt 17:21). Where there is perceived ancestral curses and covenants, family liberation is recommended as was the case of Gideon who was asked to "pull down the idol of his father's house" (Judges 6:25-26). Family liberation may require the use of salt and honey to revoke evil pronouncements from families while honey is used to restore sweetness and joy; anointing (olive) oil to destroy ill luck, break ancient curses, as well as healing of the land, among others. Charms that gave avenue for satanic penetration are exhumed while traditional shrines and perceived evil trees are felled down.

In course of counselling, clients are asked to sow different kinds of seed in faith. Battle seed for problems associated with witchcraft manipulations; breakthrough for financial favour; Fruitfulness for the fruits of the womb; marital favour for life partner; age base on the person's age to ward off evil and guarantee longevity; and back-to-sender to reverse evil bewitchment and attacks. Sickneses and diseases are most times perceived as attacks from enemies of progress.

Though everybody need counselling at one time or the other, majority of the counselees were women. Probably because they are prone to domestic, marital, health, children concerns, and mother-in-law stress, among others. Many who had attended these counselling had cause to count their blessings. The ideas exchanged and intensive prayer ministrations had led to the restoration and averting of marital delays, broken marriages, those at the verge of collapse, unemployment, poverty, and other spiritual and socio-economic challenges (Fole, 12/06/17, oral interview). Occasionally, counselees are financially empowered to start small scale businesses. Stress and tension of many were reduced, hopes and aspirations revived, rate of family and by extension societal chaos was reduced. Most importantly, it assisted in retaining church membership (Yafoghor, 12/10/2017, oral interview). It could be said that where it not for these counselling sessions, rate of crime and suicide in the society may have been on the increase.

Restoration and Life Transformation

Many faithful who hitherto had health and other challenges had cause to count their blessings through the ministry of AFPS in Urhobo as miracles, signs and wonders were replicated as in Bible times during their activities. In 1992 for instance, Mrs Esther Eguridu's crippled child was healed (*Warri Diocese Synod Report*, 1992). The annual "Healing Campaign" and "Holy Ghost Festival" by Evang. P. Lafua and Evang. (Dr) B.O. Okotete at Ovwian and Eketete respectively were known for spectacular miracles. Ohwojero Bridget who had lost her sight while in Senior Secondary 2, was restored through divine intervention in March 1994 during 'Healing Campaign' of St. John Ovwian branch held at Ovwian Primary School. Her mother took her there, and as the preacher prayerfully laid hand on her, suddenly she began to run round the school field and shouting repeatedly; 'I can see!' The crowd went agog and she was brought to the platform for confirmation. Evangelist Efe Apole (02/03/2018, oral interview) reported that in a monthly vigil held on January 21, 2011, Mr Dickson Diotomre who had speech impediment was miraculously healed after drinking miracle water blessed by the leader of Okwagbe branch.

Empowerment

A number of youths had received informal training for the work of ministry through regular attendance to AFPS meetings. They are manifesting charismatic gifts in their leadership positions as priests and lay evangelists. Esisio (10/10/17, oral interview) affirmed that the AFPS has contributed massively to the spiritual training of many youths serving in Urhobo churches. Some members of AFPS and AYF who through regular fellowship, interaction, and dedication became very useful in the service of God and are demonstrating charismatic leadership in the ordained and lay ministries include: Paris Lafua, Benjamine Okotete, Johnbull Mariere, Sunny Jedje, Efe Apole, Isaiah Bakanure, Ven. F.A Onokpite, Ven. S. R. Umukoro, Ven. J.A Mukoro, and Ven. Paul Whiskel. Others are: Rev Esisio Sunday (AFPS Cathedral session under Evangelist Sam Jewh), Rev Abiri Osheho Levi (AFPS Eku branch and AFPS Ovwian branch), Ord. Israel Oghenebrorhien (AFPS Ovwian branch), Evangelist Edafe Onovwie (AFPS Ovwian branch), Catechist Samuel Abakpa Ogoda (AFPS Ovwian branch), Bro Andrew Gbruku Uhurie AYF (Ovwian branch), Dennis Omovworiowho (Owhase branch), Rev Solomon Ogun (Eketete branch), Bro Djighere (Ovwian branch), Chief Mrs Eshegbe (Ovwian branch), Mrs Oke Erhiorire. (Ovwian branch), and Sunny Jedje (St. Andrew's branch Warri).

Thus, AFPS has become a breeding ground for future ministers of the church in Ughelli. Zealous

members are identified and given responsibilities to lead prayers, preach, and conduct deliverance as to build their self-esteem and grow their spiritual gifts. The challenges which Pentecostalism had hitherto posed on the churches had been nipped in the bud and the cause for the exodus of Anglican faithful to neo-Pentecostal churches today found in AFPS meetings. The group has empowered the structural development of many churches. Marble pulpit and reading desks, cash, building materials, and such like are regularly donated. They also engaged in road maintenance for the church and common interest.

Print and Electronic Media Evangelism

The increasing appropriation of new communication technologies and other media in transmission of gospel messages constitute another character of AFPS. Hackett stated the importance of media in gospel propaganda and Pentecostal/charismatic culture thus:

The appropriatism and use of modern media technologies facilitates the dissemination of the word to the masses. The use of the media is clearly a tool of expansion, a reflection of globalizing aspirations, but it is also part of a calculated attempt to transform and Christianize popular culture so that it is safe for consumption by 'born-again' Christians. He added that the 'modern' media are deemed as acceptable weapon for God's army in the battle against Satan (1998, p.264).

There is frequent patronage of Ughelli diocesan press for publications and advertorials by different branches of AFPS which has encouraged many to attend their programmes. The Diocesan printing press, "Christ evangel printing press", commissioned December 2, 2012 and began full operation in February 2013 is a major income generating source for Ughelli diocese. The press secretary, Miss Victoria Ogberoye (14/06/2018, oral interview), revealed that the press has continued to receive great patronage from many branches of AFPS for printing of fliers and banners to advertise their programmes. The patronage has helped to maintain the structure and empower the workers.

Growth of New Ecclesiastical Bodies

The success of AFPS evangelistic activities has led to the increase in congregations and parishes in Urhobo (Ughelli, Sapele, and Warri dioceses). The Ophere-Agbarha in Ughelli, and Adagbrasa-Elume in Sapele churches emerged through the ministry of AFPS. The churches planted in collaboration with the AYF include Anglican Church of the Messiah on February 5, 2012 at the instance of Mrs Janet Eshegbe (AFPS, Ughelli Diocese); and St. Stephen's Okoloba Street, Effurun on January 24, 1994 by S.U. Ayanyen in his compound. The latter, is currently

third largest congregation in membership and finance in Warri Diocese. The two groups of St. John's Ovwian planted St. Barnabas in 2005, and St. Michael in 2011. Others that owe their foundation to both groups are Our Saviour's, Okurode Urhobo on April 17, 1991; St. John's Ugboroke on August 1, 1993; St. Paul's, Agbarha-Warri on August 10, 1993; St. Mark's, Otor-Okere on September 4, 1997; Christ the King, Warri on September 27, 1998; and St. Thomas, Idiaregbe in March, 2004. S.E Ogue (2003) remarked that one factor that helped in the growth of Anglican churches in Urhobo and beyond was preaching of the gospel and planting of churches in several towns and villages by the AAPS and AFPS. Bishop Dafiewhare (of Old Warri Diocese) stated towards the end of his tenure thus:

During the period of ten or eight years, the task of evangelization in the Diocese received special emphasis. Encouragement was given to the various evangelistic groups/society, Members of the Anglican Adams Preaching Society, the Anglican Mimeyeraye Fasting and Prayer Society (AMFPS) which came into being under our episcopate;...through the evangelical fervour of these groups the word of God was proclaimed in all nooks and crannies of Warri Diocese, often with signs and wonders following in consequence of which converts were won in thousands (1991: 35).

The increase in congregation necessitated creation of new parishes and Archdeaconries. The diocese of Warri at her inauguration on January 25, 1980 had the Archdeaconries of Isoko and Urhobo. In 1991, the number had increased to six-Oleh, Ozoro, Patani, Sapele, Ughelli and Ughievwen in addition to Cathedral church of St. Andrew's Warri. The foundation Bishop, Rt. Rev. J.O. Dafiewhare retired on February 1, 1992 and was succeeded by Rt. Rev. N. Enuke on April 12, 1992 (enthronement). He created Aviara, Iluelogbo, Warri, and Uwheru Archdeaconries which increased the number to ten. To cement the growth, three new dioceses emerged, namely; Ughelli on January 8, 1998, Oleh on December 21, 1999, and Sapele on January 12, 2009.

Development of New Churches

Schism is technically, a rupture of institutional unity without denial of orthodox beliefs. It involves doctrinal issues; those who break away continue to retain essentially the same mode of worship as the parent church, and usually occur over matters which but for human frailty could be settled amicably (Ayegboyin, 2000). In Anglicanism, charismatic movements also referred to as Pentecostal movement have often led people to split from their parent church to either join or found new ones (Diara and Onah, 2014). In Urhobo, it may be said that the Anglican churches sleeps and almost

always wake up to be greeted with schismatic news which has constituted a perennial socio-religious malady.

The first and major separation with devastating effects occurred on November 5, 1993 during a fasting and praying meeting. The foundation leader-*Osun*, Daniel D. Mimeyeraye, who had initially vowed never to leave the Anglican Church, announced his exit thus; "I, Evang. Daniel Dikeji Mimeyeraye, in obedience to the instruction of God have left the Anglican Church" (Onokpite, 2019, p. 73). He left with some officers and branch leaders; took many facilities of the church acquired or donated afore time by sympathisers and members of the group, and started the 'God's Grace Ministry'. His separation could be traced to a break in communication and power tussle between him and then Vicar of St. James Ojabugbe, Warri (Very Rev. Prof S.U Eriwwo, Rtd). His "Divine Calling" may have been influenced by the fuelling of increased oppression, and greed for money as he may have heeded the counsel that if he separated from the church, he would become sole controller of the group's finances (Ogue, 2003; Ivwighren, 2/4/1018). He currently refers to himself as "Saint D.K.G Miyerijesu *aka* Bishop of the whole world, Jesus Holiness, Demon Destroyer and the Only Begotten Son of God". The exit of Mimeyeraye shook the churches in Warri, Udu and Ughievwen areas of Urhobo to their foundations. Many church facilities such as land, vehicle, and musical instrument among others were lost to the separatist as some donors left with him. A good number of church teachers/agents and Parish Church Council members joined him as well. Although few persons later returned, had D. D. Mimeyeraye remained in the church and continued his evangelical cum revivalism campaigns with their attendant testimonies, no church in Urhobo Christian landscape may have equalled the Anglican Communion in numerical growth and infrastructure.

The next appeared on Sunday November 19, 2003 by Evang. Peter Onovwede, a lay-reader, building committee chairman, and leader-*Osun* of St Michael's Sedico Road, Enerhen. He severed relationship with then Owrode Archdeaconry of Ughelli Diocese, and founded Holy Ghost Era Mission, Enerhen. It was occasioned by some discontentment between him and pioneer Vicar of St. Michael, Rev. S. I Igue. Then Bishop of Ughelli diocese, Rt. Rev. V. O. Muoghereh approved that Evang. P Onovwede and his retinue should leave St. Michaels's and start St. Luke's church, Enerhen. The two churches are about two hundred meters apart. The later, through the dynamic leadership of Peter grew very fast numerically and by 2001, it had two services. The withdrawal of Onovwede was linked

to a prophecy he received from a Pentecostal pastor during a revival meeting; that God was calling him to become a pastor. Another factor was baptism service in which 42 infants were christened to the disapproval of Onovwede who was vehemently opposed to infant baptism. The following Sunday, November 30, 2003, he pulled down the church bill board and announced his withdrawal. The owner of the parcel of land where the church was situated followed him. He left with virtually all musical instruments of St. Luke's AFPS. St. Luke's remained with about 50 persons out of over 500 members. On March 12, 2005, he was ordained by Most Revd. Prof S. G. A. Onibere. The gigantic structure of "Holy Ghost Era Mission" which he founded by far dwarfs St. Michael's church building. The musical sound from the church proves that they are a force to reckon with.

Evang. Michael Utoro was the third AFPS leader to branch out of the church. He was a leader for years at St. Paul's Ekiugbo. On March 22, 2006 he decided to found, "Divine Fire Ministry". There was no clear reason to his departure and the church authority invited him for a dialogue which he refused to honour. Many members of AFPS Ekiugbo branch and other Anglicans within and around Ughelli who had benefited from the charismatic ministry followed him. In 2012, another group separated from St. Michael's Sedico Road Enerhen.

The diocesan of Ughelli, Rt. Rev. Cyril O. Odutemu in a bid to curtail the trend directed in 2012 thus;

The establishment of prayer houses outside the church Premises seems clear to us as a means to break away after gathering members under the canopy of the Anglican Communion. In view of the prevailing circumstances. Necessity has laid it upon us to give the following Directives, and we so direct that all prayer houses organized with the name of the church outside the premises should be brought back to the church...Ex-Cathedral (Onokpite, 2019, p.78).

The next year, leader of All Saints Cathedral Ughelli AAPS, Evang. Sam Jewhe who had devoted his time to the prayer ministry until it grew to an enviable height left the church, and founded Gethsemane Prayer Ministry in 2013. The development started when the leadership of AAPS attempted resolving the rift between Sam and his wife, and advised that he resign from his position. Rather than reconcile his family crisis, he decided to open a private prayer ministry. Realising that his act contravened the prevailing diocesan policy, he requested that the church authority start new worship centre at the AAPS site. In response, the

church demanded for the formal hand over of documents of the ministry including landed property to prove his sincerity. He declined the directive and tendered a resignation letter to the bishop. His withdrawal again, rocked the boat of many Anglican churches in Ughelli.

In same year, Evangelist S. U. Ayanyen who became born again in 1953, joined AAPS in 1967, and served as prayer leader of St Stephen's Effurun started the New Glory Revival Ministry on July 7, 2013. His departure was more devastating as many Anglican faithful followed him including church teachers, agents, branch leaders and an ordinand. On why he left the church, Ayanyen (22/06/2018) said;

I remained with them till recently when they brought another policy that the entire evangelist running their prayer ministry should come and submit everything to the church; while the church would tell them how they would be operating, probably create an office for them. I disagreed with them and they disagreed with me when they said we were private ministries and as such should be expunged from the Anglican Church. The aftermath is my resignation to continue with the work I have been into which is the New Glory Revival Ministry Incorporated. However, we are still in good terms. I am not quarrelling with them. They will miss me and I will miss them too. I was a great ministry gift to the Anglican Church and their platform helped me this far (Onokpite, 2019, p. 81).

Unbalanced Acts and Teachings

The Bible is the basic source of belief and practices of the Church. The foundation of Anglican doctrines are the three ecumenical Creeds-Nicene, Athanasian and Apostles'; the Chicago Lambeth quadrilateral of 1930; the historical formularies-thirty-nine articles of religion; the Book of Common Prayers; the Ordinance; the Standard Divines, and the formally adopted doctrinal provisions and Canon laws of various national churches and provinces of the Anglican Communion (Fape 2013; Onu, 2019). However, some of the activities of AFPS appear at variance. Wotogbe-Weneka commenting on Article 27 of the 39 articles of faith said;

That baptism is not only a sign of profession of Christian faith and a mark of distinction from non-Christian but is also a sign of new birth. It is also an instrument through which those who are rightly baptized are grafted into the church, receive forgiveness of sins and adopted, visibly signed and sealed (through the Holy Ghost) as sons of God, as well as a means through which faith is confirmed and grace increased by virtue of prayer unto God. Infant baptism is to be retained by the church just as Christ instituted it (2009, p. 58).

In their report Philip Kpolugbo and W. Oruremu (12/12/2017, oral interview) said that one of the beliefs of the Anglican Church under the calculated attack of charismatic movements (AFPS, AYF, AAPS, and EFAC) is infant baptism. For them, Jesus' instruction in Mark 16:16 remains; "He who believes and is baptized will be saved". They also argue that baptism should be by immersion as exemplified by Jesus. The pattern of sprinkling water on infants at the church baptismal font is seen as an aberration and contradiction. Baptism is the symbol of beginning the Christian life, and should only be administered to those who have begun the Christian life (Grudem, 1994). They discourage presenting their children for baptism and christening during churching of women after child birth. Those who were baptised as infants were advised to go for immersion in a river in another parish or a Pentecostal church which opened door through which the church lost some of her youths to the new generation churches. Infant baptism is an aged long tradition of the church and any attack on it is an affront on the Anglican faith and her heritage (Badawusi, 2016:153 citing Arhawho, 2015).

Some of the leaders of AFPS go to the extent of conducting churching of women after child birth as well as receive accompanying thanksgiving offering. This is a liturgical service and a preserve of a priest that should not be handled by any group or unit of the church. They also receive tithes which God commanded to be brought "into the store house, that there may be meat in my house" (Mal. 3:10). The store house is the main church and not a group. The liturgical Maundy Thursday service of washing of feet that commemorates the institution of the Holy Communion and presided over by the Bishop or those holding his license (priests) at local parishes are becoming a feature of AFPS. They carry out feet washing exercise at will during their prayer meetings and other revival meetings.

There are cases of insubordination by leaders, 'Osun' of AFPS to constituted church authority- bishop, priests, and deacons. They disdain the 'Holy Order', and claim to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, and mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit that should lead the church rather than submit to any other authority (Erivwo, 1993). The priests (clergy) are looked at as Biblical Aarons ordained for ceremonial sacerdotal duties. They (*Osun*) are the contemporary Moses and Elijah, who are more spiritually inclined and anointed to liberate the people of God and lead them to their promised land. Diara and Onah remarked that;

The Pentecostal charismatic groups of the Roman Catholic Church, unlike their counterparts in the Protestant churches, recognise the Priests of their

churches at their meetings as an antidotes to doing anything which would be incompatible with the teaching or practice of the church. They do not regard their prayer meetings as substitute for the church's liturgy. Their leaders are also active enthusiastic promoters of their church hence the Roman Catholic Church does not contribute to their proliferation of independent Pentecostal movements (2014, p.56).

They group raise money and procure such facilities as vehicles, musical instruments and generators; cooking utensils, decoration flowers and clothes, and preaching platforms, among others. However, most of these facilities were kept in either the leaders' or members' homes in defiance to Diocesan rule that all church group properties and their receipts be domiciled in the church premises.

They teach that women who are in their menstrual flow are unclean, defiled and should not share in their "holy congregation". Again, that sex between couple before a general prayer meeting is sinful. Couple who involved in conjugal relationship the night preceding their prayer meeting have sinned against the temple of the Holy Spirit and must confess before the leader who sits near the font for prayers of forgiveness. They sometimes place and interpret private revelations through dreams above the Holy Scriptures. These are not in consonant with Anglican teaching. The claims of their foundational leader, Evangelist Daniel Mimeyeraye that: God frequently spoke to him above every Biblical prophet and those who refused to accept him as "Bishop of the Whole World will languish in hell"; that God usually orders Jesus Christ to stand from the throne for him (Daniel) to sit while Jesus remain standing, until he has finished discussing with God the Father; the Bible has no record of anyone who has sat upon the throne of judgment and that all must believe in this revelation or vision if they must make heaven. God had spoken to him that he is greater than Moses, Elijah and the rest of the prophets who lived before him, whose life are recorded in the Bible. On the day he told Jesus to leave the throne for him to sit on, Jesus was afraid and said no Father; but God said to him that Jesus only worked for three years and lived for thirty years but himself have lived for God for over thirty years and his works greater than those of Jesus and he is the one the people should look up to henceforth; but he (Daniel) said, Father, they will not believe my story.

He also claimed that his father who died as a priest of a local deity had been transferred from hell to heaven following his (Daniel's) good works and position in the house of God. That is, that good works by the living could in turn, save the dead from

their agony in hell; meaning “salvation for the dead”. These teachings implied using ‘window of grace’ by the church to lay dangerous foundation. These unscriptural teachings called for urgent check to stop their spread. The voluntary withdrawal of Daniel from the church to start a personal congregation has put to an end such unbalanced teachings and acts.

The group as a charismatic movement was initiated and founded by Africans in Africa chiefly to meet the spiritual yearnings of fellow Africans. Their activities and programmes are akin to the African Initiated churches as they share the same worldwide. They give spiritual interpretation to virtually every issue of life like unemployment, prolonged pregnancy, disappointment, and so on. The members are sometimes enjoined to wear white apparel as a sign of spiritual purity or holiness (Ayeboyin & Ishola, 1999). The position, however, makes many of their activities fall short of Anglican character. Most of the leaders, *Osun* of AFPS not only claim spiritual motivation and inspiration for the foundation of their prayer meetings and organisations, but also for all their regular activities.

Another area of conflict was their predilection for giving Christianity an African coloration. The methods of adapting some of the African cultural traits to Christianity seem to constitute some challenges. For instance, to boost attendance during revival meetings, members are required to attend with cutlasses or razor blades to cut the devil or suspected witches and wizards to death. Besides, the profuse dabbling of powder and pouring of water and anointing oil on members appear syncretistic as it is a replica of what is obtained in *Igbe* movement, a traditional religious practice among the Urhobo. The predilection of AFPS for African culture is either a paradigm shift to traditional religion or building members’ faith on religious symbols rather than on the word of God.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

We have in this paper expanded the foundation, characteristics, and impact of Anglican Fasting and Prayer Society using the functional theory to the development of Christianity in Urhobo of Niger Delta region, Nigeria. The study revealed that the group as a charismatic movement has always been led by a charismatic personality in the Anglican Church. The church in her dynamism, gave due recognition to the movement.

The rise of AFPS and other charismatic movements began the process of reforming the Anglican Church in Urhobo to align with African culture. Where it not for the emergence of charismatic movements in Urhobo Anglican

churches, Christian practice would have continued in the purview of Western pattern. Through the movement, another phase of Christianity quite different from what was obtained earlier in Urhobo has been witnessed. They organises crusades and revivals, spiced with inspirational songs and motivational talks backed up with speaking in tongues, prophecies/visions, warfare prayers and exorcism. Most importantly, one of the challenges of Pentecostalism hitherto posed on the Anglican Church were nipped in the bud; as whatever was causing mass exodus of faithful to new-Pentecostal churches are now found within.

Though the movement has brought new wave of revivalism into the church, and increased the frontiers of the Christianity in Urhobo and beyond, it also has its own unique challenges. The response of some leaders to doctrinal and liturgical issues presents AFPS as ‘a church within the church’. The rift between some leaders of the movement and authorities of the Anglican Church occasioned the founding of new churches which has expanded the Christian landscape in Urhobo. The myriad of leaders withdrawing with their supporters to form a new church revealed that some use the Anglican Church as avenue to gain charismatic power, popularity, and followers to achieve their personal aim of being a church founder and General Overseer. Thus, depopulating the Anglican Church to their personal advantage. Bishop Idowu-Fearon rightly observed that “as human organization, the charismatic movement, whether in the Anglican Communion or any other mainline denominations are prone to problems” (2000: xv). Wittingly or unwittingly, the movement has become a breeding ground for charismatic leaders and church founders in the area.

We therefore recommend the following for the sustenance of the relevance of the movement in Urhobo Anglicanism:

1. That the incessant demand or call for money through offerings, thanksgivings, sowing of seed and other forms of donations should be curtailed in the light of Biblical truth and prevailing harsh economy in the country.
2. That a chaplain in priestly order be appointed to provide members with proper pastoral guidance at the Diocesan, Archdeaconry, and Parish levels.
3. There is need for all leaders of the group to be have some theological training to enhance their edification, empowerment, and functionality as a viable Anglican arm in mission and evangelism.
4. Periodic conversations between the church hierarchy and leadership of the group should be

encouraged to build confidence and improve relationship.

5. Further in-depth research on the churches that emerged from the movement will enrich the understanding of growth pattern of new generation churches in the Niger Delta, Nigeria, and Africa by extension.

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