

## BOOK REVIEW

UKAH, Asonzeh F.-K, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power: A Study of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria*. Trenton, NJ and Asmara: Africa World Press, 2008. 410pp. Pbk. ISBN: 1-59221-621-8. \$34.95.

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Ukah's book is an in-depth description of one of the largest Pentecostal churches in the world, the (Nigerian-initiated) Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG). It should be of interest to anyone studying contemporary Pentecostalism, but it is also a fascinating case study of the growing importance and power of Pentecostalism in post-colonial Nigeria. As John Peel states in his foreword to this book: "church is hardly a sufficient designation of what RCCG has become: arguably one of the largest private companies in Nigeria, a conglomerate with vast holdings in property, business enterprises, media companies and educational institutions" (p. xxiii).

Ukah's first three chapters focus on giving background information on the development of Christianity in Nigeria and the specifics of the emergence of the RCCG out of the Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S), which is one of the so-called "Aladura Churches". The rest of the book gives detailed descriptions and analyses of the current organizational structures and institutions of the RCCG (chapter 4), the role of media, money and women (chapter 5), the universe of beliefs (chapter 6), religious symbolism (chapter 7), and situates the RCCG as both a global church and a transnational institution (chapters 8 and 9).

Interestingly, Ukah sketches the life of the founder, Josiah Akindayomi, as someone who became interested in Christianity as part of a quest for spiritual power as a "babalowo" ("traditional medicine man"). He joined the C&S after he became convinced that the powers of their prophetess were stronger than his. He founded and led a fellowship within the C&S that finally broke away in 1952 and instituted the church that is now known as the RCCG. This name, according to the founding narratives, was given to Akindayomi in a vision and should therefore never be altered. It became known as "the weeping church" because of its mode of prayer and its strict adherence to holiness principles (notably monogamy in a context where polygamy was normal). Ukah's characterization of the church under Akindayomi's leadership is sharply contrasted with his description of the RCCG under Akindayomi's successor and the present leader, Enoch Adeboye. At

the time of Akindayomi's death in 1980, Adeboye had not been a member of the RCCG for long. Nevertheless, Akindayomi made him his successor, and under Adeboye's leadership the RCCG became the global conglomerate that we know today. This has propelled Adeboye to *Newsweek's* list of the fifty most important people worldwide.

In chapter 3, Ukah sums up Adeboye's leadership using the terms "routinization and recharismatisation." Following Weber's theory of charisma, one would expect routinization after the first, charismatic beginnings of a religious group. In this case, however, Adeboye has emerged as a uniquely charismatic and unequivocal leader in his own right who derives his legitimacy not by referring to the founder of the church, but by claiming to be appointed by God. In short, the RCCG, according to Ukah, *was founded twice*, with Adeboye as the current leader with an enhanced charisma.

In chapter 4, the description of the emergence of model parishes to attract more "elite" Nigerians into the church is of special interest in relation to the analysis of the structuring of church finances and the entwining of the fate of the RCCG with the elites of Nigeria. This analysis is extended in chapter 5, which describes a well thought-out and sustained policy of creating and mobilizing people who are influential in society. Critically important is Ukah's description of the interaction of the RCCG with political power and the increasing prominence of "God talk" in Nigerian politics (chapter 6). Chapter 5 also devotes some attention to the extensive use of media and the position of women in the RCCG. In comparison to other Nigerian Pentecostal churches, the position of women is positive in the sense that they can become pastors as well. However, in practice their position is generally dependent upon their husband's career within the RCCG, where women are usually positioned one rung below the husband. At the same time, the numerical growth of the church is, Ukah argues, very much due to the willingness of women to testify publicly about the miracles they have experienced.

The "new" RCCG under Adeboye's leadership has integrated prosperity teachings into its central ideologies and practices, which Ukah contrasts with the RCCG's reputation as a "weeping church" under Akindayomi's leadership. He contextualizes the rise of these teachings within the historical period of "austerity" in Nigeria following interventions by the IMF in 1986. Although this seems to be in contrast with the historical roots of the RCCG, as Ukah points out, these teachings also provide the fuel (in terms of resources) for one of the most central characteristics of the RCCG: its extremely rapid growth under Adeboye's leadership. The RCCG is strongly focused on church-planting and seems to be able to reproduce overseas what is, in Ukah's words, the greatest asset of this church: "its ability to generate networks of interest embracing spheres of strong economic, social and political structures" (p. 348). However, it would be wrong to see the RCCG only in social and political terms: as Ukah recognizes, this astonishing growth is sustained by a strong belief in the divine purpose of the RCCG to spread the gospel in preparation for the end of times. It is what makes this church such a fascinating case study: balancing holiness and prosperity teachings, it is an institution that is gathering a huge amount of worldly power in expectation of the end times.

Ukah has provided a great service to us by describing and analysing this phenomenon so conscientiously, with great insight *and* critical distance. He has pioneered the analysis of one of the most interesting and dynamic institutions worldwide. His description of the RCCG is important for anyone working on Nigerian Pentecostalism, but it is his analysis of the RCCG as a “New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power” that any scholar working on contemporary Pentecostalism has to reckon with.