

Oguntade, AO 2023, 'Spiritual Transformation in the Nigerian Baptist Convention: a Historical Reflection on Recent Paradigms', *African Theological Journal for Church and Society*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 93-113

Spiritual Transformation in the Nigerian Baptist Convention: a Historical Reflection on Recent Paradigms

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Abstract

Recently, there have been paradigm shifts in the spirituality of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. One major factor responsible for the spiritual transformation is the influence of Neo-Pentecostalism or the Charismatic movement. This new wave affects the Baptist heritage of the denomination. This study reflects on the spiritual transformation in the Nigerian Baptist denomination from the 1980s to 2022. The study is significant because it gives insight into the causes of the spiritual transformation in the Convention over the years and encourages the Convention to assess her spiritual activities to retain her identity continuously. It examines notable spiritual transformations in the history of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, highlighting the factors that were responsible for them and isolating some of the noticeable spiritual transformations. The paper utilises the historical-analytical method.

Introduction

The Baptist denomination is one of Nigeria's foremost historic mainline churches. Rev. Thomas Jefferson Bowen, the first American missionary sent by the Southern Baptist Convention to Nigeria, landed in 1850 and planted the first Baptist Church in 1854 at Ijaye-Orile in the present Oyo State. The Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC) had passed through many stages in its development. The era of leadership in NBC can be divided into two: the era of American missionaries and the era of nationals (Oguntade, 2012). In addition to her

attendant challenges and achievements, scholars have documented these early stages in different academic works (Bowen, 1857; Collins, 1993; Bamigboye, 2010; Ajayi, 2005). The concern of this paper is not to reflect on this historical background but to examine one of the current trends emerging in the NBC's history.

It is important to note that in the context of this study, spirituality is the total essence of the church in relating to and satisfying God, and enriching the spiritual state of humanity through various spiritual programmes to develop the total person to have a right standing with God and good human relations with fellow human beings in society. Spirituality is a channel through which an individual or collective Christians commune with the Divine and are consecrated for his course. Spirituality is in contrast with an emphasis on the physical or mundane. Spiritual transformation in this study implies a shift from a traditional pattern of spiritual activities to a new or changed pattern. Conservative Baptists consider evolving spirituality in the NBC as alien to the traditional Baptist faith and consequently a challenge to the continuity of the traditional Baptist faith as inherited from the missionaries.¹ If this trend continues, future generations will be disconnected from the Baptist heritage inherited from the 19th-century Nigerian Baptists. It would not be wrong to propose that the Baptist heritage will lack a Western touch in the near future. As such, an African version of the Baptist heritage will be inherited by future generations.

In this study, the author used participant observation to gather information. He, the author, was born into the Baptist denomination, received training as a

¹ Foremost among the conservatives that are skeptical of the current trend in the NBC is the former Convention President (1977-79) and General Secretary (1979-91) Rev. Dr. S.T.Ola Akande. He wrote a letter dated 3 February 2014 to the Convention leadership through the NBC President, Rev. Dr. Supo Ayokunle titled "A Wake-Up Call to All Nigerian Baptist Leaders, That Our Baptist Heritage Faces The Danger of Corruption, Miss-Use, Give-Away, Liberalism and Annihilation as we come to the End of the 100 Years of Our Existence as NBC." Among other issues raised, he showed his displeasure at the increasing shift to Pentecostal forms of worship in the Baptist churches in Nigeria. He argued that the uniqueness of Baptist worship has been lost. He claimed that, "in our days, the Convention was very strict at ensuring that Baptist churches kept to the simplicity of our Baptist worship. I was a policeman to see that churches were conforming to our Baptist form of worship."

Baptist pastor, and has served in various capacities. The *Nigerian Baptist* magazine, correspondence, the Convention Constitution, Regulations, and Minutes were consulted. Likewise, some individuals with a long-standing in the Baptist denomination were interviewed. These formed the primary sources for this study. Previous works found in books, journals, and the internet were also consulted as secondary sources.

This study has its limitations. There are up to 17, 586 Baptist churches cooperating with NBC.² It is impossible to study each of these local Baptist churches in a study like this. However, churches' representatives meet annually in a designated place for Convention-in-session, which a conference or two conferences host. In recent years this annual gathering, which used to be a medium of reporting to the churches about the administrative stewardship of the NBC leadership and a forum for assessing NBC administrators, has witnessed a remarkable spiritual transformation. One can argue that what is obtainable in the Convention-in-session reflects what goes on in most local Baptist churches, because local Baptist churches were responsible for forming the Nigerian Baptist Convention in 1919. The approach for this study is historical-analytical. It is historical because it considers the past events that influenced the present situation. It describes what used to be in the past compared to the present situation. "It is an attempt to understand a phenomenon by determining its processes of growth and dynamics of internal change" (Ogundare 2013:22). It is analytical because it involves critique and evaluation of facts and information relative to this study.

Previous Studies on NBC Spirituality

Scholars have often tried to explore Pentecostalism's influence on the NBC's spirituality. Travis Collins and Ademola Ishola (1995) provided a theological appraisal of charismatic renewal from the Baptist point of view and offered

² In 1990, the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in cooperation with the Convention attempted a base count which stipulated the number of the Nigerian Baptist Convention churches to be 5,000. Another attempt by IMB/Global Missions Board coalition in 2000/2001 stipulated that the number of Nigerian Baptist churches to be about 8,000. See also the 2010 Nigerian Baptist Convention Church Census Report (www.nigerianbaptist.org, accessed 19 October 2022).

ways the denomination can respond to this phenomenon. Writing in the same period as Collins and Ishola, Emiola Nihinlola (1995) advocated for the accommodation of students and youths who had embraced a Pentecostal mode of worship like vigils, speaking in tongues, laying on of hands, and deliverance. Moses Oladeji (2005) extensively discussed the initial problems of Pentecostals' influence on mainline churches, especially the NBC. Deji Ayegboyin and Emiola Nihinlola (2008) focussed on the Pentecostal impact on Baptist churches' doctrine and practices, including ministration of spirit-baptism, deliverance services, and praying with anointing oil.

Samuel Tsegbeyeri's Ph.D. Dissertation focused on "Economic Paradigms of Nigerian Pentecostalism and their Influences on Mainline Protestant Churches in Warri Metropolis." The scope of the research was limited to Warri Metropolis, and including the Pentecostal influence on other mainline Protestant churches, including Anglican, Methodist, and Presbyterian denominations, as well as Baptist. The present study is limited to the Nigerian Baptist Convention. Furthermore, the work of Tsegbeyeri was specifically on the influence of Pentecostals on economic paradigms. The present study is interested in the spiritual transformation of the NBC.

Humphrey Okereafor's (2011) dissertation addressed the "Influence of Pentecostalism on the Contemporary Nigerian Baptist Convention." This influence was limited to beliefs and practices, and how the NBC has responded to that influence. Mathews Ojo (2018), a notable scholar on Pentecostalism, identified that the response of Nigerian Baptists to the charismatic renewal passed through phases. Each epoch reflected certain peculiarities of that age. First, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the response was antagonism to Pentecostal spirituality. Second, from the mid-1990s, the posture changed to tolerance. Third, by the new millennium, there was a realisation that certain aspects could be utilised as a tool for church growth. The work of Mathews Ojo (2018) helps us to understand that, to a large extent, the NBC has accepted practices of Pentecostalism. These previous studies are relevant to the present study to some extent. However, to the best knowledge of the author, none of the previous works has analysed recent developments.

The Antecedent to the Contemporary Spiritual Transformation in NBC

The gradual spread of charismatic renewal from the 1970s to the NBC has brought tremendous changes in Baptist spirituality. Before the embrace of the charismatic renewal, the worship services of Baptist churches used to be solemn. After a call to worship by the pastor or worship leader, the common slogan was "God is in his holy temple; let everyone be silent before him." Praise songs were not part of an order of service. However, hymns were a required part of the order of service. At least four relevant hymns would be sung in a particular service. At that time, shouts of "Hallelujah", speaking in tongues, prophecy, and over-night prayers were considered sacrilegious.³ Congregational prayers conducted during mid-week services on Wednesdays, traditionally called prayer meetings (*ipade adura*), used to be contemplative compared to the aggressive prayers modelled after those of the African Indigenous Churches (AICs) and the new Pentecostal churches.

It should be recalled that the charismatic movement grew from the university environment in the 1970s. According to Ojo (2018:80), the charismatic renewal movement in Nigeria began among youths who were connected with the Scripture Union in war-torn Biafra (Eastern Nigeria) in 1968, but it became a national phenomenon through the students of the University of Ibadan. Ojo (2018:80) reports that in January 1970, revival broke out when some students in the Christian Union claimed to have been baptised in the Holy Spirit in a private prayer meeting. Though a small group, three leaders of the Christian Union boldly shared their Pentecostal experiences. Within a short time, more students accepted the experience, and it soon spread to other Christian groups such as the Student Christian Movement (established in Nigeria in 1937), Scripture Union (established in 1887), and other universities. This crop of students returned to their churches—mainly mainline churches—to propagate their new experiences. They could be regarded as radical Christians or

³ At the time it was believed that these practices were alien to Baptists' traditional way of worship and practices. Baptists believed in a simple mode of worship or solemn worship rather than a spontaneous and noisy atmosphere of worship. In addition, they believed that spiritual gifts must be exercised with caution, especially speaking in tongues, which must not be exercised without interpretation.

enthusiastic revivalists who believed that the members of their churches must replicate their new religious experience. Commenting on this decisive and dramatic moment in the history of missionary churches, Ogunewu (2022:5-6) notes, “invariably, such Pentecostal emphases and practices as personal experience of conversion or the born again experience, aggressive prayer, night vigils, baptism of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, emphasis on faith healing and miracles, the use of charismatic gifts and holiness of life, were soon becoming audible and visible among certain older denominations”. Nkwoka (2010:82), citing Mbiti, affirms that the charismatic renewal or Neo-Pentecostalism of the 1970s was an ecumenical movement that cut across all human boundaries and barriers of denomination, nationality, sex, class, and age , and involved both clergy and laity.

In the 1980s there were mixed reactions to the wave of the charismatic movement on NBC. This generated debate and resulted in recommendations of the stance of the Convention to local Baptist churches. In order to protect her heritage and distinctive doctrine and practices, the Convention attempted to control the new wave. Although the Convention acknowledged the reality of the charismatic movement, it made frantic efforts to suppress what it regarded as the extremism of charismatic tendencies. The minutes of the Baptist denomination attest to this assertion thus:

We recognise that Baptists have a distinctive mode of worship that is in consonance with the free-church traditions, and we recommend that all Baptist churches continue to identify themselves with our traditional Baptist way of worship. We further recognise that whereas charismatic fervour has an important place in worship, however, excessive charismatic practices such as weeping when praying, speaking in tongues which nobody understands nor can interpret; laying hands on people to give them the Holy Spirit; jerking when praying; holding separate prayer meetings are not desirable in Baptist worship (Minutes of the NBC 1982:230-232).

The resultant effect of the implementation of these decisions in some Baptist churches was a conflict between the youth and the elderly. To the charismatic youth, the adults were unnecessarily persecuting them. This scenario was also

observed by Oladeji (2005:75) when he affirms that “such implementation led to the expulsion or suspension of members who embraced Pentecostalism”. While some Baptist members were excommunicated for practising “unbaptistic practices” in an era of heightened conservatism, others left because of what they considered as unbearable “coldness” in the worship services or persecutions by the elderly members of the church who disallowed expression of their charismatic gifts. Some of these excommunicated Baptists either joined established charismatic churches or founded new ones.

Some, however, stayed in the Baptist churches. Those that remained continued to pursue their spiritual transformation agenda in their different local Baptist churches. Primarily, the Baptist Students Fellowship, (BSF; formerly known as Baptist Students' Union [BSU]) founded in 1957 by American missionary Miss Mary Frank Kirkpatrick, promoted this spiritual enthusiasm. It should be noted that there are two types of NBC BSF: church-based and campus-based. The penetration of the charismatic movement into the Baptist denomination was quickly embraced by Baptist youths. It is earlier noted that religious awakening was facilitated by students of institutions of higher learning in Nigeria, which started at the University of Ibadan and spread to other universities and colleges. This religious awakening started in the Christian Union Fellowship and spread to other Christian Fellowships in Nigerian universities. The BSU as it was then called was first established at the University of Ibadan as a campus-based Christian fellowship in 1960. It was during this period of the religious awakening in the 1970s that it became a nationwide movement. Ajayi (2010:205) submits that, “by the 1970s and 80s, BSU had become a nationwide movement”, due to the proliferation of tertiary institutions in the country in the mid-1970s and the increased interest of the Baptist Mission of Nigeria and the NBC in student ministry. One can also argue that the religious awakening of the 1970s and 1980s helped facilitate BSU's growth and expansion. However, some Baptist students were members of Scripture Union or Christian Union during this period. Therefore, based on the encounters of the Baptists through either denominational or interdenominational charismatic renewal movements in the tertiary institutions, the students/youths strongly felt that the church should embrace Pentecostal religious sentiments. Ojo (2018:34) corroborates that “it was the Baptist Student Fellowship that provided a major institutional channel for the penetration of Pentecostalism into the Nigerian Baptist Convention.”

Surprisingly, from the early 21st century, Baptist churches began to welcome charismatic spirituality. It was possible because some Baptist members influenced by the neo-Pentecostal movement from the mid-1980s began to enrol in Baptist Colleges of Theology and the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomosho. These students were university graduates. "While a few university graduates had passed through the seminary in the past, this type of student began to enrol in increasing numbers from the 1980s" (Ishola 2011:208). In 1992, when the Master of Divinity, a programme designed for university graduates, was introduced in the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, it encouraged most young Baptists who had embraced the charismatic movement to enrol as student pastors. This new crop of pastors replaced the conservative pastors who were retiring from the pastorate. These charismatic pastors gradually began to reflect the Pentecostal mode of worship in Baptist churches. Church members also began to have a flair for this new mode of worship, sometimes demanding dynamism in worship from their pastors.

It should be noted that the late Evangelist Job Alabi, who died on 26 May 2017, at the age of seventy-two years, was believed to be a significant factor and foremost in the charismatic revival that engulfed the Baptists from the 1980s. Evangelist Job Alabi was a gifted Bible expositor who pulled in crowds at his preaching campaigns. His ministrations were notable for strange happenings that were hitherto alien to the conservative mode of worship in NBC churches. Generally, after a well-delivered sermon, the evangelist would sing a congregational hymn and ask the congregation to thank Jesus if that was the only thing they could use to express thanks unto God. Suddenly some in the congregation would scream, fall, and roll on the ground; others would speak languages incomprehensible to many listeners and prophesy. Conservative Baptist pastors and congregants were skeptical of this new wave, fearing that it would erode their Baptist heritage and distinctive values. Such people, therefore, condemned this new movement in strong terms. However, other Baptist evangelists continue to promote charismatic enthusiasm through their preaching styles and ministrations. Before long, exhibiting spiritual gifts like speaking in tongues, visions, and prophesying became a norm in the worship experience of some Baptist churches. If the missionaries who came to Nigeria in the 19th and 20th centuries could visit Nigeria in the 21st century, they would notice a significant lacuna between the Baptist faith they passed on to

Nigerians and the one that is now practised. The factors discussed above were the antecedents to the cultivation of the new spiritual transformation. The following section isolates the notable spiritual transformation in the NBC.

Notable Spiritual Transformation in the NBC

The repackaging of Convention-in-session activities

Convention-in-session is an essential aspect of the life of the NBC. It usually comes up once in a year, from a Saturday morning to a Thursday afternoon in April. It brings to a close the accounting year of the Convention. Reports from different departments, boards, and institutions of the NBC are significant parts of the Convention-in-session. These reports are printed in the Convention's *Book of Reports and Annual Accounts and Financial Reports*. Questions are raised, and delegates make comments on all the reports. Although it is also an occasion for spiritual revitalisation, the hallmark and zenith of the Convention-in-session in the past was business, which was for administrative transparency and stewardship accountability. It is well captured in the denomination's constitution thusly:

The annual session of the Convention is an occasion for the rendering of account of stewardship by the elected officers of the Convention to the local churches through their messengers. It is also an occasion for the critical evaluation of the work done in the light of the mandate given to these officials by the previous Convention-in session. The reports, minutes, etc would be expected to reach the messengers ahead of each annual session not later than two weeks before the commencement of the annual session. The annual session shall also serve the purpose of spiritual nourishment of messengers (2014:11).

It can be inferred from this regulation that the Convention-in-session of the NBC is for accountability, but because it is a religious institution, spiritual activities are also included. In the past, spiritual activities were limited to expository Bible study and brief sermons in the general sessions.

However, in recent times, the format of programmes has been repackaged by different leaders of the Convention. This transformation became noticeable during the period of Solomon Ademola Ishola, the apex leader of the Convention (then called General Secretary). Moreover, it intensified during the period of Samson Olasupo Ayokunle. In biographical research on the leadership of Ademola Ishola, Famutimi (2020:122) observes that prior to the assumption of Ishola as the apex leader of the Convention, some youth have left the NBC because their spiritual yearnings were not met. In order to retain the youth and bring back the youth who have left the denomination, “Ishola endeavoured to make use of the beneficial dimension of Pentecostalism and avoid those that were detrimental to the health of the Convention” (Famutimi, 2020:122). Famutimi’s view is not different from that of Ojo. Ojo (2018:42) argues that “largely, Ishola's innovation brought a renewal to Baptist spirituality in that era”.

As a practical step in this direction, by 2002, the evening rally was introduced, and this has since been sustained. The evening rally is a revival campaign where it is believed that the congregants will have a divine encounter. The remarks of Ishola (2018:12), the then General Secretary of the NBC, is insightful on the reason for the introduction of the evening rallies: “I felt the Convention was riddled with crises, acrimony, and unnecessary arguments; I never liked that. So, I wanted something quite different, and somehow, God orchestrated it so that we started shifting people's focus to God's Word through evening rallies. During Business Hour, we normally scaled through without rancour, accusation, or misgiving from anybody”. Therefore, introducing evening rallies in the Convention-in-session was a strategy to mitigate the tension formerly experienced during the Business Hour. Inevitably, this has also encouraged local Baptist churches to organise various spiritual programmes for the betterment of the congregants. These spiritual programmes have exposed Baptist churches to different spiritual gifts and offices.

Moreover, in the year 2011, as Solomon Ademola Ishola was preparing to retire as the General Secretary of the Convention, he introduced a glorious morning encounter, a service that usually comes up between 8 am and 9 am runs from Monday to Thursday. This programme aims to bless the congregants spiritually to have real testimonies before the session ends. There was also an experiment in 2018-2021 to rebrand the Convention-in-session by separating

departmental meetings from the Convention-in-session during the tenure of Samson Olasupo Ayokunle. The intention was to free the annual event from the cumbersomeness of meetings and to concentrate more on spiritual matters. Of course, this is a departure from what entailed in the past. However, this has been reverted by the current President of the Convention, Israel Adelani Akanji. One can argue that Ishola intended that the spirituality of the Baptist denomination would resemble that of Pentecostalism. It can be corroborated by his move to restructure the NBC. Ishola (2006:263) submits that “the basic reason being the need to move from the politically oriented character of our American (Southern Baptist Convention) system to a more biblical African-Nigerian contextualised system”. Among other things, the restructuring committee that was set up gave recommendations to change the NBC to the Nigerian Baptist Church or the Baptist Church, Nigeria. The Committee also recommended that the General Secretary (the apex leader of NBC) should be changed to National Overseer, Church Overseer, or General Overseer. This is similar to the nomenclature in Pentecostal churches. In support of this move, Professor J. Ande, a lecturer at the University of Jos, gave credence to the need to transform the spirituality of the NBC. Among others, she (2009:86) made the following suggestions:

Let there be more spiritual programmes in the Convention. The various organisational programmes should be taken off since they have their annual sessions separately. Their time can be given to more in-depth spiritual programmes... Rebranding the name from Convention, which has more of a business connotation, to another, more spiritual name.

To a large extent, Ishola's administration between 2001 and 2011 transformed the spirituality of the NBC to resemble Pentecostal spirituality and changed the nomenclature of General Secretary to President. However, he was unable to change the nomenclature of the NBC. Therefore, congregationalism, the hallmark of Baptists, is still being practised.

Night of Wonders (NOW)

The introduction of Night of Wonders is a current trend in the Baptist denomination. It is aimed towards retaining membership in the denomination and gaining new members. It has been painstakingly observed that Baptist

members attend Pentecostal spiritual programmes like Holy Ghost Service, Holy Ghost Night of Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), and all Night Prayers of Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries. This programme comes up every third Friday in March, July and December. It was introduced in 2012 by Olasupo Ayokunle. The venue was the Convention Centre, Idi-Ishin, Ibadan. In 2021, the programme shifted to the Baptist International Convention Centre (BICC) located on the Ibadan-Lagos Expressway. Buses are provided to convey worshippers to the programme. The service features elaborate praise and worship songs, testimonies, power encounters through charismatic messages (which are usually delivered by the Convention President and the guest preacher), and aggressive prayers similar to the spiritual activities peculiar to the Pentecostals and AICs.

The main spiritual activity that marks out the service is prayer for divine interventions in different life challenges. At the end of each sermon, invitations are made for those who want to be born again or receive miracles on life issues. Prophetic utterances are made by the preachers and occasionally by the worshippers in the service. This is unusual in a typical Baptist traditional church. Unlike what obtained in the traditional conservative Baptist denomination of the past, many preachers outside the denomination have ministered during the NOW programme. These included Pastor Ayo Oritsejafar (Word of Life Bible Church), Bishop Wale Oke (The Sword of the Spirit Ministries), Apostle Sunday Popoola (Christ Family Assembly Churches), Bishop T. V. Adelokun (Victory International Church), and Prophet Funso Akande (Gospel Promotion Outfit, Ede). Gospel singers from outside the denomination (like Evangelist Bola Are) have also participated in the programme, especially during the December edition, usually designated for praise to God. In a way, NOW rebrands the Baptist denomination to meet the congregants' popular demand for spiritual yearnings. Of course, it is a spiritual evolution, a paradigm shift from what obtained in the past.

Furthermore, the programme attracts significant personalities, like royal fathers and politicians. The royal fathers have permanent seats at the auditorium's front row, indicating a social status that must be specially recognised and honoured. The Convention President and his wife sit with the other officiating ministers in line with their official positions and functions in the service. This is similar to the Pentecostal churches' sitting arrangements,

as Asonzeh Ukah (2008) has identified in his work. From the preceding, we have seen that the Convention is shifting from typical Baptist worship and encouraging a new form of spirituality in the NBC.

Transformation in the Mode of Worship

Audi (2012:168) observed that only a few things are left of the West's visible posture in the missions churches on the African continent, especially Nigeria. Audi further notes that these little things can be seen in the buildings and liturgy inherited from the missionaries. This author posits that those relics Audi claimed remain are gradually becoming monuments. Some of the buildings inherited are either being restructured or abandoned for new ultra-modern places of worship.

Moreover, close observation reveals a gradual replacement of Western liturgy with African liturgy in the Baptist denomination in Nigeria. Expressing a similar view, Oladipo (2010:35) argues that "the Christian faith has been de-westernised in our generation." The reality of de-westernising Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa has been strongly facilitated by contextualisation and indigenisation. It is well captured by Oladipo (2010:36) when he notes that "while missionaries have always been interested in Christianizing Africans, converts in Africa have equally wanted to Africanize Christianity." Fatokun (2005:159) is right in his observation that prior to the infiltration of the Pentecostal mode of worship in the mainline churches, the mainline churches were purely intellectual religion and formalistic. Scholars have noted that Pentecostals' mode of worship is characterised by emotions and enthusiasm. For example, Anyanwu (2004:58) advances that "the place to find happy, exuberant worshippers is in Pentecostal churches...Pentecostals want to be translated in the supernatural realm during worship." The view of Ndiokwere (1995:277) is not different from that of Anyanwu. He observes that in Pentecostal churches, the place of worship is accessible to everyone: "It is a place of free movement and total participation by everyone. In the acts of worship, the movement should be rigorous and often spontaneous".

Today, these experiences are not exclusively for the Pentecostals. In some Baptist churches, when congregants are excited or motivated by the pastor's sermon, they express their agreement or seek to tap into the preacher's anointing by dropping an offering at the pulpit area. Some Baptists believe that

when they pray on the ‘altar’ (or pulpit area), their prayers will receive immediate attention from the Divine. Before now Baptists believed that a Christian could offer prayer anywhere and that God would respond as appropriate. Recently, these experiences happened in the 2022 Convention-in-session hosted at BICC along Ibadan-Lagos Express Way, Afuwape, Ogun State. Some congregants went out during sermons to give offerings and others, during recess, went to the pulpit area for personal prayers. Before, this was strange and would not be welcomed in Baptist worship services. In addition, the NBC officially approved the use of anointing oil in 2015. The Baptist Policy states that “As a denomination, we believe in the proper use of anointing oil to minister to the sick and those afflicted by demons” (2015:50). Prior to the influence of Pentecostalism on Baptist churches in the NBC the use of anointing oil was not acceptable. However, today, the anointing oil can be used to pray for the sick and to practice exorcism.

Mass Ordination

Ordination is a religious rite of setting a person apart for a ministerial office (Erickson, 1986:120). It serves as a means by which a congregation officially affirms, spiritually and ceremonially, the ordained minister's divine calling to the gospel ministry (Brewer, 2011:249). According to Baptist practice, the ordained pastor is responsible for conducting believer baptism, administering the Lord's Supper, and conducting holy matrimony. This does not change the principle of the priesthood of believers, which Baptists hold in high esteem. All Christians are still qualified to participate in the church's mission and ministry. Nevertheless, for good order, the priestly acts of preaching and administering the ordinances are reserved for the ordained (Brewer, 2011:251-252). In the NBC, deacons and pastors are qualified are ordained.

The author's concern in this section is the transformation that has taken place in the ordination exercise of pastoral ministry. Hitherto, the ordination exercise of deacons is still considered the exclusive duty of the local church. However, unlike in the past, when the pastor's ordination into full-time pastoral work was done in the local church, from 2005 during the leadership of Ademola Ishola as the General Secretary of the NBC, the convention has practiced mass ordination. Mass ordination is when qualified pastors are brought together in different Baptist conferences for an ordination service (NBC Policies and Practices 2005:9). This was a departure from what obtained

in the Baptist heritage. For example, Leon McBeth (1987:244), citing Benjamin Griffith's Essay notes thus:

the association, council, or assembly of delegates when assembled is not a superior judicature, having such superior power over the churches concerned; but that each particular church hath a complete power and authority from Jesus Christ to administer all gospel ordinances, provided they have a sufficiency of officers duly qualified,... and also to try and ordain their own officers and to exercise every part of gospel discipline and church government, independent of any church or assembly whatever.

Supporting this position, Brewer (2011:257) asserts that “both John Smyth and Thomas Helwys originally believed that the entire congregation should lay hands on the ordained”. This was predicated on the belief that the clergy emerged from the laity and were probably tapped to serve ministerial functions (Brewer 2011:257). It should be noted that John Smyth and Thomas Helwys were the first generation Baptists leaders who led some Puritans to separate from the Church of England in the seventeenth century. In the earliest history of Baptists, the ordination of both pastors and deacons was limited to the calling church. At that time, a church officer could not transfer his or her ordination to another congregation. It was believed that the ordained were selected to render services to the local church (Brewer, 2011:258).

The reason for this transformation was that ordination in the local church was considered financially burdensome and, as such, was losing its sacredness. It was therefore believed that mass ordination would relieve churches of financial burden, and thereby, the ordination service would retain its spirituality. Also, it would be devoid of pomp and pageantry that may make the ordinand and congregants lose their spirituality and the essence of the ordination, which is consecration for divine service. Therefore, Baptist policy stipulates that “all candidates for ordination shall be ordained in one day at a common place by each Conference within the Convention year and there should be no fanfare and/or elaborate ceremonies” (Beliefs, Policies and Practices of the Nigerian Baptist Convention 2015: 34). However, the reality has shown that mass ordination has not reduced fanfare in any way. First, it

has been observed that each ordinand usually entertains their invitees immediately after the service, and usually, the local church bears the burden of the financial implication. Second, in most cases, the ordained pastors usually organise the ordination thanksgiving service in the various local churches, which may include eating and drinking, which is a common practice in Africa. Thus, the spiritual height that mass ordination intends to attain has not been achieved. However, it should be recognised that mass ordination, comparatively with the past church-based pastoral ordination, is a recent spiritual transformation in the history of NBC.

Clamour for Prophetic Office

There are two recognised offices in a local Baptist Church: pastor and deacon. A trained pastor can serve as a missionary, evangelist, and teacher, and can preach prophetically. To the Baptist, a prophet does not only foretell, but also forth tells. This confirms the position of Familusi (2018:19) when he writes, “Prophets are first and foremost preachers, who call people to repentance... Their primary appeal, therefore was a return to the Lord and loyal observance of the stipulation imposed by Him as terms of the covenant”.

Kingston (1965:73, 74) described a prophet in two ways, basing his definition on the Hebrew word *naba* which means “to cause to bubble up” and the Greek word *propheteuo* which is derived from two words—*pro*, meaning “before” or “for”, and *phemi*, “to bring to light by speech.” From these expressions, Kingston (1965:73, 74) defined and described a prophet as follows: First, a prophet is one who involuntarily bursts forth with spiritual utterances under the divine influence. Second, a prophet is God's spokesman and speaks from a divine influence, under inspiration, whether as foretelling future events or as exhorting, reproofing, threatening individuals or nations as the ambassador of God and the interpreter of His will to men.”

Subscribing to Kingston's view, Baptists believe that a prophet is not only a seer; he is also God's mouthpiece who speaks fearlessly to rebuke sins without minding whose ox is gored, with the expectation that there will be repentance and re-birth. Baptists also believe that one does not need to hold the title of Prophet before functioning in a prophetic ministry. Today, however, Baptist pastors are clamouring for the special recognition of a prophetic office. This set of pastors believes that some pastors are specially called to be prophets,

preaching prophetically and engaging in foretelling and prophetic prayers. There are Baptist pastors in the NBC who organise spiritual programmes similar to Prophets in AICs, such as taking church members for prayers on mountains, engaging in marathon fasting and emotional prayers, and organising unique healing and deliverance sessions.

On the other hand, because pastors are not allowed to have the title of Prophet, some notable Baptist members and pastors have left the denomination to establish prophetic ministries, including Morakinyo Oyatumo, a son of a retired Baptist who left the Baptist Church to establish a prophetic ministry named Goodnews Prayer and Deliverance ministries, Ogbomoso. Some Baptist churches in the South West of Nigeria have benefited from his prophetic ministrations. Prophet Timothy Oyekunle, a former pastor in the NBC, started as a freelance prophet, and eventually founded a church named Goshenland Battle of Christ church (also known as Battle Axe) in Apete, Ibadan, in order to fulfil his prophetic calling. Prophet S. O. Olakanmi, formerly the pastor of Temple Baptist Church, Ede, resigned from the Baptist pastoral service to start Power of His Resurrection Ministry in Wasinmi, Osun State. Prophet Mathew Olaniyi Oladosu is a former pastor in the NBC who left the denomination to establish a prophetic ministry in Oyo.

Baptists interviewed by the author believe that the lack of recognition of the prophetic office by some leaders of the NBC is a challenge. They opine that some Baptist leaders are averse to prophetic ministry; therefore, prophetic ministry lacks solid ground to fully operate because it is not officially recognised in the denomination. Therefore, it is their opinion that there is a lack of opportunity to operate the prophetic ministry in the Baptist denomination fully. Generally speaking, there is fear on the part of the carrier of prophetic ministry to fully make proof of their ministry and the fear of the abuse of the office by the stakeholders. Notwithstanding, from the preceding, it is evident that some Baptist pastors are clamouring for recognition of prophetic ministry. This is a new dimension in the spirituality of NBC.

Conclusion

This paper has established ongoing spiritual transformation in the NBC. Majorly, the spiritual transformation has been influenced by the charismatic

movement that engulfed the Baptist denomination in the early 1980s and the admission into the seminary of dynamic young pastors who had had contact with charismatic Christian fellowships in the universities. This influence has resulted in spiritual transformation in the Baptist liturgy and practices and in an aspiration for recognition of prophetic office by some Baptist pastors. Ademola Ishola was the first NBC leader to accommodate Pentecostal spirituality, and the subsequent leaders are improving on his legacy of spiritual transformation of the NBC. Whereas dynamism is a welcome development, there is also the need to review these spiritual activities in the light of biblical teachings and Baptist heritage. This is necessary so that Baptists will continue to retain their legacies and identity and will continue to be true to the Bible.

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