

## SUMMARY

### **The Charismatic Movement in Sierra Leone (1980-2010): A Missio-historical Analysis in View of African Culture, Prosperity Gospel and Power Theology**

#### **1.0 Account of what has been done**

This study is a missio-historical analysis of the Charismatic Movement (CM) in Sierra Leone, as it relates to African Culture, the Prosperity Gospel and Power Theology. The analyses pursued in this study have as background one main research question. The study asks, ‘To what extent has the CM utilized the religious, social and political background of Sierra Leone [Part I] to contextualize its core message so as to carve a ministry that attracts the urban élite [Part II] and appears to reshape the context in which church ministry is carried out in that country [Part III]?’ To proffer answers to this broad question, further sub-questions were developed that were intended to offer clarification about the history and level of contextualization within the CM. The sub-questions are:

- (i) What are the background factors (religious, social and political) in which the rise of the CM occurred in Sierra Leone?
- (ii) What are the means used by the CM to reach the different segments of the population and how critical and effective have they been?
- (iii) To what extent is the CM critical of and effective in dealing with issues such as polygamy, initiation ceremonies and ancestral rituals that are central to Sierra Leone’s [African] cultures?
- (iv) How effective and critical is the CM’s appropriation of (a) the Prosperity Gospel and (b) Power Theology?
- (v) How does the rise of the CM broaden and reshape our approach to African church historiography?

The study is divided into three parts, with each part giving answers to a segment of the main research question. In Part I, the study discusses conceptual, historical and leadership issues within the CM. This discussion is designed to provide answers to the question of how the religious, social and political context of Sierra Leone influenced the rise and shaped the ministry of the CM.

After giving a general introduction of the study in *Chapter 1*, I proceed to a discussion of the contemporary debate about the theology of the CM in *Chapter 2*. This debate which begins by exploring current literature on the CM in West Africa examines the history of the CM and notes that because of what transpired in West Africa in the 1980s, the CM must be differentiated from both the Pentecostal Movement and African Independent Churches. The basic theologies and missiological impulses that are attracting the urban élite to the CM across Africa and beyond are also discussed in the final section of that chapter.

Having set the tone in the preceding discuss, *Chapter 3* addresses the specific history of how the CM emerged in Sierra Leone. While acknowledging the role played by interdenominational evangelistic organizations, the chapter contends that the CM found an already fertile ground upon which its ministry thrived. Further, I examine the historical development of five key Charismatic churches in order to describe the present religious practices they have adopted in reaching specific segments of Sierra Leonean society. The CMs local missions to urban slum, rural poor and Muslim populations are discussed, (in the context of Sub-question *ii*). The formation and present role of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Sierra Leone, as well as the efforts to forge collaboration with foreign Charismatic evangelists, the creative use of contemporary media technologies and the profile of Sierra Leone's urban élite are also brought to bear on the discussions of this chapter.

To fully understand Charismatic revivals in Africa, the broad religious, political and social background that works in their favour requires careful analysis. In light of this, *Chapter 4* argues that the broad religious, social and political context of Sierra Leone provided suitable exigencies that led to the further strengthening of the CM. While acknowledging that Christianity and Islam are part of the religions practised in Sierra Leone, the chapter only discusses the essential components of Sierra Leone's African Traditional Religion (ATR). This decision was deemed necessary because the CM has used the religious context offered by Sierra Leone's ATR to carve a ministry that resonates with the traditional and religious sensibilities of its urban élite members. The sections on the political and social contexts reveal systemic issues of corruption and bad governance which fizzled into the horrendous decade long rebel war of the 1990s. Throughout this devastating episode of war and violence, the Christian church acting with other faith communities supported international efforts that helped to mediate peace and promote reconciliation after the rebel war.

The concern of *Chapter 5* is to seek an understanding of how the centralized form of leadership espoused by the founders has shaped the church and pastoral ministry of the CM. In this chapter, I discuss the leader's conversion narrative and call to pastoral ministry. Further, I examine their approach to and specific gifting in ministry, (such as healing evangelists, prosperity preachers and deliverance ministers). This discussion is useful because it broadens our understanding of how Charismatic leaders appropriate themes of African culture, the prosperity gospel and power theology in the conduct of their pastoral ministry. The CMs approach to theological education and the ecclesiastical roles performed by women within the CM are also discussed.

Part II explores three critical issues – culture, prosperity and power – that presently shape the CM's missiological basis. This is taken in order to understand the second part of the broad research question that asks how effectively and critically the CM has contextualized its core message so that it would attract a significant following from the urban élite. To clarify crucial instances of this broad question, two additional sub questions were developed (as shown in sub-questions *iii* and *iv*).

*Chapter 6* takes up this exploration with an assessment of the CM's appropriation of African Culture as it relates to polygamy, initiation ceremonies and ancestral rituals (cf. Sub-question *iii*). Using two of Sierra Leone's leading theologians, the section argues that although the call to incorporate African culture in church ministry and theology is not new, this topic has today received revitalized enthusiasm within the CM. From the analysis of these crucial cultural themes, this chapter makes clear that the approaches taken by Charismatic churches have not only set the CM apart from African Independent Churches, but they also suggests that the ministry they have carved out is in resonance with the underlying needs of the African urban élite who form the core of its membership.

The central thesis of *Chapter 7* is a discussion of the appropriation of the prosperity gospel, which is perhaps the CMs biggest selling point (as shown in sub-question *iv[a]*). Referencing key teachers of the prosperity gospel, the chapter argues that the apparent buoyancy of this teaching in Sierra Leone is not entirely foreign, given Sierra Leone's traditional heritage. The prosperity theologies taught by Charismatic leaders are not only solidly rooted in, but have also enriched Sierra Leone's cultural understanding of what it means to live in good health, acquire material wealth, as well as succeed in life's endeavours. The external influences of the prosperity gospel, the intersection between prosperity gospel and community development and the impact of this teaching on Evangelical churches in Sierra Leone are also discussed.

*Chapter 8* presents the CM's power theology in answer to sub-question *iv[b]*. The chapter notes that after acquiring material prosperity, the CM appears to be seeking ways by which its members can exercise spiritual power. The chapter notes that, reacting to Sierra Leone's traditional worldview, the CM hopes to capacitate its members so that they are better able to subdue evil forces, break the circle of demonic manipulation, and repel witchcraft attacks. Charismatics see this strategy as important because such misuse of spiritual power is thought to hamper human flourishing. The chapter argues that although this may have effectively resonated with the cultural context and worldview of Sierra Leone, it is however not critical enough as it portray a tendency to lead church members back to their pagan past.

In Part III, the study discusses the missiological implications of the accession of the CM to the church scene in Sierra Leone. The discussions of this part are designed to answer the final component of the main research question which addresses the reshaping that the CM has brought to the churches and pastoral ministry in Sierra Leone. This re-shaping of church ministry has implications for African church historiography as is suggested by sub-question *v* of the study.

In this part *Chapter 9* offers an evaluation of the CM in Sierra Leone, in order to assess the overall effectiveness and critical nature of the CMs contextualization using Paul Hiebert's model and it relevance to the social and cultural context of Sierra Leone. Further, the chapter discusses the implications that the ministry of Charismatic churches have for Evangelicalism in Sierra Leone, the discipline of missiology and the field of African church historiography. Additional crucial snippets that emerged which would aid further understanding of the CM in Sierra Leone are presented as proposals for reflection and upon

which further research may emerge. The chapter ends by affirming that because the CM is believed to have reshaped the context in which the Christian church carries out its ministry in Sierra Leone, attention needs to be placed on the CM as a new development that has dawned upon global Christianity.

## **2.0 Difficulties and methodological approaches of the study**

Although I encountered difficulties in the conduct of this study (as noted in *Chapter 1.8*), two broad methodological approaches were used to gather data for this research. First, I conducted an extensive literature review, in order to provide opportunity to compare the CM in Sierra Leone with what obtains in other parts of West Africa. Second, I undertook field research which included the use of further sub-methods, viz. Charismatic church survey, participant observation, interviews, collecting Charismatic literature and accessing online and electronic resources of Charismatic churches. This technique provided the primary materials upon which the analysis and conclusions of the study are drawn.

In order to properly represent the CM, I used the life stories and personal testimonies of ordinary Charismatic Christians (such as the stories of Prince Thomas [*Chapter 7.0*] and Francess Kamanda [*Chapter 8.1.4*]), to show how their lived experiences deal effectively and faithfully with the local religious, traditional and cultural contexts. My decision to include personal testimonies in the narrative is grounded upon the presupposition that personal testimonies are an important part of the CM. For the CM in Sierra Leone, themes of culture, prosperity and power are not isolated events, but ones that form a concentric circle with direct impact on the individual Charismatic believer. In their view, the church that is able to respond to these issues and contextualize its ministry so that it is better able to address the human need of health, wealth and power is a true expression of the authentic forms of African Charismatic Christianity that is needed in Sierra Leone. The inability of traditional mainline churches to deal critically and effectively with such issues is making the CM the port of first call for many Christians in Sierra Leone.

## **3.0 Conclusion**

Following from what has been stated earlier, it is the considered view of this writer that after three decades of existence, the CM seems to be providing effective responses to the events and processes that are at work in the cultures of the people of Sierra Leone. Because these responses make sense to people, a form of Christianity that tries to be faithful to the Scriptures and relevant to the cultural context was bound to emerge. This Charismatic expression of the Christian faith is not only proving attractive, but has also resulted to a reshaping of the church scene in Sierra Leone.