CHAPTER FOUR

History, Structures, Practices and Theology of the
Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church

4.1 History

In this chapter, the writer examines the beginnings of the MFM church, her belief, structures, practices and some factors which may have accounted for its burgeoning growth. The MFM church belongs to the new genre of churches in the global South Christianity whose emphasis, according to Phillip Jenkins is on ‘healing religion par excellence, with a strong belief in the objective existence of evil, and (commonly) a willingness to accept the reality of demons and the diabolical.’¹ These are churches given to spiritual warfare and ‘breakthrough’ theology’ as a way of succeeding in life. There is a widespread belief in these churches that there are hindrances and obstacles to one’s progress in life occasioned by the activities of malicious spirits and their agents. One needs God’s favour and help to break through this man made and Satan orchestrated barriers in order to enjoy the good and prosperous life and the blessings thereof. Because of the prevalence of this teaching in many of the new generation churches in Nigeria, theologians have come to regard this prevalent teaching in these churches as a ‘breakthrough’ theology. It has its roots in the teachings of one of the foremost Nigerian Pentecostal pastors, Bishop David Oyedepo of the Living Faith Church (aka Winners Chapel) Nigeria. The belief is that a Christian has no business with poverty, as the favour of God that brings abundance of prosperity in the form of health, wealth and a life free from life’s vicissitudes is guaranteed under the new covenant established in Christ.

The Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries began as a small prayer group of about twenty five persons at the home of the General Overseer, Dr. Daniel K. Olukoya, in Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria in July 1989. It was then a gathering of people of like minds who were passionate about combative prayers considering the perceived prevalence of evil in the Nigerian society. The fellowship metamorphosed into a full-fledged church in 1994 when

Sunday services started. According Ayegboyin, the name Mountain of Fire and Miracle was chosen because the name implies that the church is considered to be a mountain higher than any problem that one may have. Fire is indicative of both the presence and power of God that can be invoked to consume, roast, and burn their stratagem to ashes.²

At the inception of the church, the Nigerian nation was going through immense economic throes as unemployment was high, poverty was on the increase, cultism was rife in tertiary institutions in the country, and a general societal dysfunctions. People were desperate for solutions to their survival needs. This was when the MFM Church began as a prayer fellowship to cater for the numerous needs of participants. Soon, membership increased as people came in drove to seek for God, miracles of deliverance and healing. A revival was in the making as aptly described in the Church and Mission magazine, a non-denominational periodical in Nigeria

It was an era of history being made again. This time, not on Azusa street in California, where the spark of the Holy Ghost Fire gave birth to the Apostolic Faith Church; not in the American woods, where Charles Grandison Finney was ‘set ablaze’ for reverberant global revival; not in Scotland where the prayer of John Knox deposed the queen; not in Southwark London, where the lips of Charles Hardon Spurgeon burned with eternal flames; but in Lagos...³

The church has grown tremendously in the past twenty years and now has its presence in many nations of Africa, Europe and America and in other continents of the world. The church claims that the ‘Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries’ Headquarter meetings is the largest single congregation in Africa with attendance of over 120,000 in single meetings.⁴ This positions the church as one of the largest in Nigeria and Africa.

The General Overseer of the church has a first class honours degree in Microbiology from the University of Lagos and a PhD in Molecular Genetics from the University of Reading, United Kingdom. Like many leaders of the AICs and African Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, Dr. Olukoya did not attend any Seminary nor school of Theology, but began his ministry as a the coordinator of a prayer fellowship which later metamorphosed into a full

³ ‘From a Living Room to the World’s Stage, the phenomenal growth of MFM at 20’, Church and Mission Magazine, Vol 1, 9, Nov/Dec. 2009, 18.
fledge church. Many of the new generation churches are not given to theological education but emphasize on demonstrating the power inherent in the gospel. John Mbiti had said that there are three main areas of African theology today. These are written theology, oral theology, and symbolic theology. He considers written African theology as the privilege of a few Christians who have had considerable education and who generally articulate their theological reflection in periodicals, books and articles written in different European languages. Oral theology is produced in the fields, by the masses, through song, sermon, teaching, prayer, conversation etc. ‘It is the theology in the open air, often unrecorded, often heard only by small groups, and generally lost to libraries and seminaries.’ The third type of theology present in Africa today is the symbolic theology which is expressed through art, sculpture, drama, symbols, rituals, dance, colours, numbers, etc. The Mountain of Fire and Miracles can be classified into the second category of Mbiti’s analogy of Afro-theology, i.e. oral theology. Leadership here is not given to biblical scholarship, but seeks a demonstration of power over existential circumstances and needs in the African context, particularly as it relates to their understanding of evil and diseases.

The Mountain of Fire and Miracles church has its roots in the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) founded by one Apostle Joseph Babalola and others in the early 1930s. The CAC is one of the foremost indigenous churches in Nigeria founded by some indigenous Christians in south west of Nigeria desirous of the true apostolic faith experienced in primitive Christianity. They were not contented with the spirituality or piety of the mainline churches that were perceived to be devoid of power to meet the exigencies of their times. Olukoya, the founder of MFM acknowledged the deficiencies of the mission churches then as he said that the European missionaries were not acquainted with the spiritual terrain of the Nigerian environment and so they made a lot of mistakes. ‘The missionaries did not understand the spiritual problems of the people; hence they could not address them.’ According to him, the missionaries made a lot of difference in the areas of social ministry by building churches, schools, hospitals etc, but they presented to the Africans Christianity that is bereft of power to rid the people of evil experiences that was a common feature in African societies. Missionaries and researchers who have worked extensively amongst tribal people in

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7 D.K Olukoya, Dominion Prosperity, 37.
developing world share this view of differences in worldview of Europeans and Africans. Robert C. Blascke observed:

The concerns of the missionaries on the need for repentance from sin and man’s need for salvation are both genuine and biblical. However as some of the missionaries argued, this emphasis is a reflection of Western puritan culture of the 18th century. Africans will nevertheless seek a religion that provides answers to the reality of their daily experiences.  

This forms the thrust of the theological emphasis of the Mountain of Fire and Miracle Church. Blascke believes that the initial approach for the presentation of the Gospel to animists should first be the ‘other part’ of the Gospel; the power of Jesus’ that can provide answers to their dilemma of dealing with evil spiritual powers. In African societies and Traditional religions, the belief in the ubiquity of evil forces is rife. In Yoruba cosmology for example, Wande Abimbola asserts that ‘...there are eight agents of evil. They are known collectively as ajagun (warriors against human beings). They include iku (death), era (disease), ofo (loss), egba (paralysis), oran (trouble), epe (curse), ewon (bondage/imprisonment), and ese (accident or and other evil thing that affects human beings).’

The essence of religion for the African is the provision of relief, safety and protection from this array of evil agents. AIC and Pentecostal churches that share in this belief about the cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil have grown over the years in Nigeria. This is because their belief in cosmic struggle resonates with the worldview of the people and that of African Traditional Religion. This solution to this struggle lies in regular prayer sessions and exorcism. Ayegboyin avers that the AICs overemphasis on evil has virtually changed the church from divine truth to power religion. They take seriously matters relating to spirit possession, powers and occult forces that impact negatively on humans. These churches, often referred to as deliverance churches make it their sole aim to rid the African society of evil powers, and their prayers are often targeted at the devil with all its agents as the sources of evil, misfortunes, poverty, diseases and vicissitudes of life that people suffer.

The notion that every disease has its source in the manipulations of evil forces derives from their New Testament understanding and literal interpretation of texts related to Jesus’ healing activities. Jesus in most cases simply cast out evil spirits out of victims of maladies

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8 R. C. Blascke, *Quest for Power*, 27.
9 D. Ayegboyin, ‘...But Deliver us from evil...’ 33-64.
10 D. Ayegboyin, ‘...But Deliver us from evil...’, 33-64.
especially those suffering from mental disorders. This, according to Aylward Shorter was because in Jesus’ time there were no precise ideas about sickness. ‘It would be going too far to say that a ‘spirit theory’ of disease took the place of ‘germ theory’, but there was no germ theory in Jesus day and spirits were very often identified as the cause of disease. Moreover, cures often took the form of exorcism during which a dialogue took place between Jesus and the spirits who were accounted responsible for the sick man’s condition.’

A onetime missionary to Africa assesses mainline churches’ failure to meet the heart and spirit needs of Africans as ‘a failure to recognize the reality of the spiritual world’ and therefore, a ‘lack of expectation or even acceptance of a ready recourse to spiritual power.’ Aylward Shorter describes the current trend of a drift from the mainline churches to new generation churches in Africa on account of seeking for power to meet existential needs this way:

Large numbers of so-called independent churches and new religious movements are coming into existence. As long ago as 1968, David Barret identified as many as 6,000 such movements in Africa alone... These have spread with surprising rapidity in many countries of the Third World. These millenarian teachings and their tenets concerning demonic illness and faith-healing are often attractive to Christians who are dissatisfied with the attitude of the mainline, mission-related churches, Catholic included, towards healing and exorcism.

The MFM Church has a large followership of people who before now belonged to the mainline churches and other denominations that do not dwell on spiritual warfare. The church’s emphasis is on holiness and Pentecostal power as experienced in the New Testament, with a particular stress on exorcism has attracted many into its fold. A recent public acclamation by the governor of Ogun state in Nigeria, Chief Gbenga Daniel drives home the point on the prime focus of the MFM church. He said during a visit to the MFM prayer city during the monthly Power Must Change Hands Programme ‘I am aware we have...

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12 Robert C. Blascke, *Quest for Power*, p.27.
14 One attractive feature of the MFM church is the regular monthly ‘Power Must Change Hands programme.’ it holds on every first Saturday of each month in the sprawling prayer city along the Ibadan –Lagos Express road devoted to prayer, fasting and healing. This programme is akin to the pool of Bethesda experience in John 5, where the sick and impotent gather awaiting the turning of the pool by the angel of God. People gather at this...
a lot of Pentecostal churches, but definitely, the MFM is different. When you look at churches where prayer is the issue, MFM is number one. I have heard about it and I have witnessed it today.\textsuperscript{15}

The church started as an offshoot of the Christ Apostolic Church, one of the foremost indigenous churches in Nigeria. The MFM church however is often categorized as a Pentecostal church because of its emphasis on Holy Spirit, power, divine healing and exorcism. The church shares similar doctrinal beliefs with the CAC and same ministry emphasis on prayer-healing. Besides the late Apostle Joseph Ayodele Babalola who was one of the founding fathers of the CAC church is highly revered by Daniel Olukoya as his mentor. Many of his publications are dedicated to Babalola, whose ‘… demonstration of the power of God over evil forces was overwhelming’\textsuperscript{16}. He said this about the late Babalola, (referred in the following text as Brother J.A).

Brother J.A and his team of aggressive evangelist and prayer warriors entered forbidden forests, silenced demons that demanded worship, paralysed deeply-rooted anti-gospel activities, emptied hospitals by the healing power of the LORD Jesus Christ, rendered witchdoctors jobless and started the first indigenous Holy-Ghost filled church in Nigeria. So far-and we stand to be corrected-none has equalled, let alone surpassed this humble Brother in the field of aggressive evangelism in the country.\textsuperscript{17}

The area of interests and similarity had always been in the aspect of healing through the power of Jesus Christ, and confronting and silencing demons, witches and other evil spirits. The difference between these churches however lies in methods employed in healing and casting out evil spirits. The CAC depends on prayers, use of holy or sanctified water for healing of the physically and mentally ill people, the MFM church believe in the practice of exorcism that includes severance of ‘covenant relationship’ with dead spirits, ancestral spirits, idols and local deities, witchcraft etc. These are the major sources of illness and diseases and other cases of misfortunes such as barrenness, ill luck, disasters, and setbacks in life endeavours. The MFM believes that exorcism was an integral part of Jesus ministry and

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\textsuperscript{15} Daniel thanks MFM for Prayers", The Nation on Sunday. June 15, 2008, 58.
\textsuperscript{17} D.K. Olukoya, \textit{Prayer Warfare Against 70 Mad Spirits}, 10.
\end{flushright}
go as far as suggesting that Jesus dealings with the demon possessed is key to understanding the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ.

4.2 Structure

The MFM metamorphosed from a prayer fellowship into a full fledged church in 1994, and immediately started a network of new branches in all state capitals of Nigeria, and in other prominent cities and towns across the nation. This church movement also spread to other African countries and regions of the world as pioneer missionaries were sent bearing the church’s emphasis on deliverance. Today, international branches exist in all the continents of the world. It is remarkable that a church of a Nigerian origin can make such impact in the space of twenty years and be found in the major cities of the world.

The General Overseer of the MFM church as noted earlier is Pastor (Dr.) Daniel Kolawole Olukoya. There are four Assistant General Overseers (AGOs), overseeing different departments of the ministry. Working under these AGOs are eight Senior Regional Overseers, 41 Assistant Regional Overseers all over the country and twenty one others who oversee the church’s mission abroad. There are other senior pastors who are directly responsible for one function or the other in the ever growing church ministry. Local pastors take care of local parishes. In the MFM church, the major form of evangelism is through church planting and by invitation to church programmes and activities.

4.3 Theology

4.3.1 Vision and Mission Statement

The following are the goals and aims of the Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries,
- To propagate the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ all over the world.
- To promote the revival of apostolic signs, wonders and miracles.
- To bring together the children of God who are lost in dead churches.
- To train believers in the art and science of spiritual warfare; thus making them an aggressive and victorious army for the Lord.
• To train believer to receive the Holy Ghost baptism and fire as well as a daily walk and relationship with the Holy Spirit.

• To turn the joy of our enemies to sorrow. That is why we would always have a deliverance ministry wherever we are. If you do not believe in deliverance, you are not supposed to be in MFM.

• To build an aggressive end-time army for the Lord. MFM is an end-time Church where we build an aggressive end-time army for the Lord. WHAT IS AN END-TIME CHURCH? An end-time Church is a Church where a sinner enters with two options. He either repents or does not come back, contrary to the present day Church where sinners are comfortable and find things so easy and convenient.

• To deliver those who have become slaves to Pastors, Prophets and Apostles.

• To build up heavenly-bound and aggressive Christians. The priority in MFM is for people to make heaven. It is not a worldly Church.

• To purify the Pentecostal dirtiness of this age.

The MFM church is critical of churches that do not share their view on African worldview and exorcism. Indeed, it is their aim as stated in their vision and mission statement ‘to bring together children of God who are lost in dead churches.’ These churches are often regarded as ‘dead churches’ as noted above. Some of the indigenous churches that fall into their categorization of dead churches engage in syncretism such as adopting elements of African culture and traditional religion in their worship. Some of these churches are sometimes called ‘spiritual churches’ because of their perceived occultist practices (as they sometimes use extra-biblical sources such as the seven books of Moses, the worship of angels, practices which are not found in the Bible).

This tendency of discrediting churches with dissimilar beliefs or practices has been acknowledged to be common to the Pentecostal-charismatic churches by some writers on evolving trends in African churches. Meyer, for example, noted that ‘although charismatics tend to critique mainline churches for seeking to accommodate local culture through Africanisation, they dismiss ‘Spiritual churches’ for drawing on occult forces, making use of allegedly idolatry elements such as candles and incense and thus linking up with the powers

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of darkness.’ Some of the Aladura churches in Nigeria, such as the Celestial Church of Christ and the Sabbath Churches are often regarded in the pejorative term as ‘spiritual churches’ because of their inclusion of elements mentioned above in their practice. Also included among ‘dead churches’ are mission churches, whose views on exorcism are moderated by the post–enlightenment view of Western churches that does not subscribe to existence of spirits, let alone practice exorcism.

The allusion to dead churches is one reason that in the view of Appiah-Kubi that many are attracted to indigenous churches. He reasons that ‘…the African elements—particularly the supernatural powers of the prophets and healing miracles that counteract the forces of evil, disease and witchcraft—are sought by those unhappy and dissatisfied with the strictly western nature of most of the mission churches.’ However, it is to be seen that such stance on labelling churches of different views or practice as dead churches hardly promotes an ecumenical spirit. Many of the AICs erroneously consider their churches exclusively as where God’s presence is active, and not in any other.

This belief and orientation of labelling other churches that imbibe certain cultural elements in their practices as syncretistic is the basis which Harold Turner used in categorizing the African Independent churches into two. The first of these classifications are Ethiopian churches that seceded from Euro-American mission churches and strongly accentuate African traditional elements in their worship context. The other group according to Turner is the Zionist or Apostolic churches. These are indigenous churches that emphasize prophecy, healing and possession by the Spirit and are intolerant of any measure to adopt elements of African traditions into their new found Christian faith as they always insist on strict adherence to their perception of biblical principles. They are sometimes regarded as belonging to the holiness movement. The Mountain of Fire and Miracles can be classified into the latter category.

The Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church abhor the use of cultural paraphernalia of worship such as local musical instruments like drums, tambourines, flute, xylophones etc.,

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common in other AICs and stick to imported musical instruments, like the piano from Europe and America for soul winning and edification of the body of Christ. The probable reason for this is the fear of ‘contamination of spirits’ because of the cultural linkage, as the African ancestry and culture are believed to be the source of demonization and negative or evil happenings, according to their teachings, which the ordinary Christian must be wary of. This was the perception adopted earlier on by the white missionaries who in the word of Meyer demonized and diabolized African traditional religion. Not only were the use of local instruments prohibited in the churches, ‘traditional African music was not permitted in and outside the church because they regarded everything in African culture as “pagan” and devilish, and therefore unsuitable for the church.’

Philip Jenkins reasons that the pagan inheritance has a complex impact on contemporary Christianity in Africa. He said ‘…some Christian thinkers have a highly inclusive view of the older religions, recognizing the presence of God in traditional faiths. Other believers, though, are less tolerant. The mere presence of alternative religions reminiscent of those condemned in the Bible allows some Christians to frame these practices in terms of devil worship, giving credibility to the objective existence of satanic evil.’

Does this imply that these churches are unwilling to cultivate an appropriate Christology suiting for their people? This seems not to be the case. Brinkman avers that there are some newer Pentecostal churches in Latin America and Africa that are not particular about the inculturation process as ‘They do not reflect very much at all on the cultural attire in which Jesus comes to them,... neither are they much concerned about the Western development of doctrine about him, but their concern is how ‘…they draw directly as it were from the source of living water that the New Testament Jesus has remained, unchanged for

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22 The Church & Mission Magazine, Vol.1, No.9, Nov/Dec, 2009,20. It was reported that the G.O of the MFM church purchased an Allen organ for $200,000 (two hundred thousand dollars) which is said to be the biggest of its kind in Africa. This lends credence to the fact that the church does not give attention to the acculturation process because of its suspicion of anything that has to do with African culture.


millions of people.

Kwesi Dickson, a Ghanaian theologian posits that there is an affinity between the Jewish culture of Jesus’ time and contemporary African culture so that the experiences of the New Testament characters resonates in many African cultural contexts today. This is probably why these churches will want the Biblical Jesus not to be tinkered with by the call or clamour for a contextual or an African Jesus.

4.3.2 Theology of Healing and Deliverance

The theology of healing in the MFM is predicated on sin being the root cause of all diseases. At the beginning everything God created was good. But sin came, and along with it, sickness and diseases. ‘This is why physical healing is closely associated with spiritual deliverance and forgiveness of sin.’ Jesus Christ brought relief and deliverance for the infirmed through forgiveness of sin by destroying the works of Satan. Jesus Christ has power over sickness and diseases, and freely offers healing and deliverance to those who are willing. The concept and practice of healing in the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church is predicated on faith-healing and on belief on ‘spirit theory’ as against the orthodox medicine’s ‘germ theory.’ These concepts of spirit theory and germ theory were coined by Aylward Shorter to describe the prevalent practice amongst AICs and Pentecostal churches to fault every malady on the activity of demons or evil spirit which have to be exorcised through the means of deliverance. In one of his publications, Olukoya confirms Shorter’s assertion, when he said ‘More and more people are coming to grips with the fact that it is impossible to enjoy one’s life on earth without going through some form of spiritual deliverance. This situation is more pertinent when we consider that Africans and blacks in the Diaspora are products of negative foundation.

The MFM Church believes emphatically that the African is surrounded by innumerable evil spirits that seeks his destruction from which he must constantly extricate himself by means of deliverance or exorcism. This belief in pervasive evil ruling the African sphere is corroborated by the claims of David Tuesday Adamo who reasons that, ‘The existence of evil is painfully real in the African indigenous tradition. Witches, sorcerers,
wizards, evil spirits and all ill-wishers are considered enemies. The awareness of these enemies is a major source of fear and anxiety in African indigenous society.\textsuperscript{30} In other instances Olukoya believes that infirmities are caused by curses, and until these curses are done away with, the victim will continue to suffer.

Hidden curses can hinder several people from being healed. A minister who is worth his salt will know that the first thing to do in a healing meeting is to break the curses of infirmity. If the curse of infirmity is in place and you continue to shout your voice hoarse without breaking the curse, no single healing will take place. The prayer of healing will not work if the victim is still under the umbrella of infirmity.\textsuperscript{31}

This makes healing intractably linked to deliverance as one cannot be done without the other. According to Olukoya, ‘the enemy has poured legion of angry spirits into the world. These spirits act in a rage, and exhibit unthinkable madness and wickedness.’\textsuperscript{32} At the MFM church headquarters, this writer interviewed a member who was once a member of one of the mainline churches on why he joined the MFM church, he said he was married for many years, but had no child. This was a disturbing experience for him, especially the pressure and the embarrassment he received from the extended family. He was invited for one of the ‘Power Must change Hands prayer programmes for the barren. He went with his wife and here they were told the root cause of their problem, the evil forces in their ancestry. They began attending these programmes regularly and praying vigorously to overcome these forces responsible for their barrenness. To their surprise, his wife became pregnant, and today they have two children.

The church has a Healing and Deliverance Information Questionnaire which every counselee has to fill, ‘to enhance effective deliverance ministrations’. The questionnaire comes in this format below:

\textbf{Religion and Practices}

- Father’s religion: Idols/Juju, Islam, Aladura’, Celestial, Occultism, Others, Christianity?
- Mother’s religion: Idols/Juju, Islam.

\textsuperscript{30}D. T. Adamo, \textit{African Cultural Hermeneutics}, 71.
• Your religion: Idols/Juju…
• Spiritism: Have you any idol? Have you been to native doctors before? Have you slept there before? Have you been to palmists, mediums, oracles before? Do you go to what stars foretell? Have you cast horoscope before? Do you belong to a cult? Are you in any of these faiths- Bahai, Eckankar, Grail, Hare Krishna? Do you belong to Aladura prayer Houses? Have you cut marks in your body and rubbed medicines? Have you been bathed with medicine before, Has your head/life been placed under any special juju? Has anyone put a curse on you before? Do you have ancestral shrines? Were your parents’ juju priests/ priestesses?
• What things make you afraid in your dreams-snakes, cows, dogs, cats, masquerades, armed persons, mad men/ women, monsters? Do they attack you, catch you, and pursue you? What do you do during such attacks-hide, attack back, sand bank, another world? Do you struggle through a jungle in your dreams? Do you wake up to find scratches on your skin, pain in your lower ribs? Do you wake up feeling all beaten up and tired?
• In your dreams, do you find yourself in witch coven, planning evil, sent to harm people, or people’s businesses, or to cause sickness? Have you given anyone to be killed, or killed anyone, or butchered? Have you eaten the meat of anyone killed?
• Are you afraid of enemies, death, or just simply afraid? Do you dream of open pits, graves, coffins, and corpse? Do you see dead relations, dead friends/ mates? Have you planned suicide, attempted suicide? Do you get trapped in your dreams, or locked up, or put in chains, or bound up, or put in a fence? Do you fall from heights, hill, or tree, or upstairs? Do you ever dream at all, or often cannot remember your dreams? Do you get biting/ pinching sensations? Do you worry? Do you dream of your former office, house or school?
• Is your sleep disturbed? Do you find it hard to sleep again if you wake up? Have you ever had complete sleepless nights? Have you ever had brain lag? Or gone mental? Do you have to take sleeping pills? Do you hear voices saying strange things to you? Do you discuss with them? Do you have heat in your head? Or odd movements in your head? Or a complete black-out at times? Have you ever smoked Indian hemps? Do you take hot drinks? Do you dream-walk
• Do you dream and often see yourself naked? Do you do courtship, romance, caressing in your dream? Have you had an engagement or rejected a suitor in your dreams?
How often do you have wet dreams? Do you mate- actually have the sex act? Do you always mate with the same person? Have you had a wedding/ marriage in your dreams? Do you suspect your sex partner is a spirit-mammy water/ mermaid? What has your sex-mate promised you? Do you have snakes round your waist? Do you masturbate? Or are you homosexual, do you dabble into oral sex, find it hard to stop these habits? Do you fornicate, commit adultery, and find it hard to stop the habits? Have you ever mated with an animal? Are you barren, find it hard to obtain child/ children? Are you single, find it hard to obtain a mate? Have you committed rape, been raped? Have you committed incest?

Demonization

- Spiritual Power: Have you given foods, drinks or sacrifices to spirits before? Do you buy and sell in your dreams? By looking, can you know people who are familiar spirits, witches, wizards, people who have seducing spirits, people who will be mad in future, people who will soon die, people who have crown, thrones, servants, palace, princely regalia, dress of a priest or priestess? Have you a company of spirits whom you command, send on errands, who are attendants? What is your post in the spirit world? Have you ever met Lucifer or Satan or some demonic princes in person? Do you have birds in your chest? Do you know things before they happen, by dreams, by voice? Can you turn into any kind of animals, reptiles, bird? What is change in your body? What is hidden inside? Have you powers that when you say things they happen? Do you always battle uncontrollable evil thoughts?

Olukoya who is the sole theologian in the MFM church sees everything from the perspective of spiritual warfare and demonology. The emphasis in this church therefore, as said before is to battle these evil spirits and set their captives free. They teach on spiritual warfare and encourage members to be ‘violent in the spirit.’ Olukoya said that to undo the wicked acts of the evil forces, spiritual violence is needed. ‘You must have violent anxiety. You must burst forth with holy anger, violent determination and faith. You must also possess holy fury, fierceness, rage and madness. No soul that ever cried violently to God has been disappointed.’

The negative foundation Olukoya alludes to in his book has to do with the

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individual’s ancestry. Our roots, according to him, play a significant factor on the kind of life we live and the progress we make. As Africans, we often trace our roots to our villages, clans, tribes, families, ancestors etc. According to Olukoya, ‘The destinies of most black people have been buried alive by satanic relatives.’ The orientation in the church is anti-African culture tending to follow in the line of early European missionaries who demonized the culture of the people as pagan.

Whereas some African theologians seek recourse to their ancestral roots as a means of explaining or contextualizing the gospel in Africa, the MFM considers such associations as negative because recourse to usage of ancestral past will bring further harm to the Christian. African theologians for instance will consider Jesus Christ as the super ancestor, ancestor per excellence, proto-ancestor etc. Olukoya and some pastors of same theological leaning in the new generation churches would have none of that, because ancestors, ancestral spirits and ancestor veneration in African culture are, according to them, the root cause of the numerous afflictions and ailments bedevilling Africans. Olukoya said in other publications

There is no denying the fact that many of our forefathers were wicked. Many of them served idols and made terrible covenants with very powerful entities. Again a good number of them received terrible curses. In many families, powerful idols are worshipped till date. Since you cannot isolate yourself from your ancestors, the influence of idols will affect you.

Deliverance is to dismantle the evil platform prepared for you by your ancestors

Deliverance is refusal to pay the evil bill of your ancestors

### 4.3.3 Statements of belief

1. The Scriptures are the inspired Word of God; the only basis for our faith and fellowship.
2. The one True God, ETERNAL EXISTENT in three Persons. God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Spirit.

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3. The fall and deprivation of mankind, necessitating redemption through the Blood of Jesus Christ.

4. The Salvation of Mankind is through the Redeeming Work of Jesus Christ and the Regenerative Work of the Holy Spirit. Sanctification is seen as an act of separation from that which is evil.


6. We believe in Restitution for past wrongs where possible.

7. The Ordinance of the Church, i.e. the Lord’s Supper and Water Baptism.

8. The Church Universal, both visible and invisible.

9. The Ministry, divinely called and scripturally ordained as that approved of Almighty God.

10. Divine healing as provided by the Lord Jesus Christ.

11. The Rapture ushering all believers into the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, and the second advent of the Lord Jesus Christ when He will physically land on the earth.


Of notable interest here is the belief in divine healing as provided by the Lord Jesus Christ. Olukoya emphasize the centrality of the blood of Jesus in the process of deliverance. He claims that the blood of Jesus is a potent weapon against spiritual wickedness in high places and to demolish the stronghold of satanic forces. The MFM as observed earlier teach that the root cause of every infirmity is an evil spirit. These spirits inflict all manner of sickness and diseases on people. In order to heal the infirmed, the spirit responsible for the sickness has to be identified and cast out or exorcised. Many whose ailments have defied Western orthodox medicine troop to this church as a last resort. Others who are impoverished by the worsening economic situation in the country and cannot afford cost of treatment at the hospitals also come trusting God for divine healing.

4.4 Practises: Spiritual Warfare and Imprecatory Prayer

The belief and practice of the MFM Church is rooted in the axiom that prayer is the key and solution to all human difficulties. It is a ministry given wholly to prayer as often seen
in their regular weekly and monthly programmes. People are encouraged to pray earnestly and accompany such prayer with fasting in order to overcome problems in life. As it is, the emphasis on prayer here follows the old theological maxim, ‘Lex orandi, Lex Credendi’, the law of prayer (the way we worship), and the law of belief (what we believe)... how we worship reflects what we believe and determines how we live’.\(^{39}\) The way of life in the MFM is the way of prayer. Prayer is believed to hold the key and solutions to every human difficulty. It is recommended that prayer be accompanied with fasting, as it is believed this is potent. The length of fasting is determined by the gravity of the problem.

A visit to the headquarters of the MFM headquarters church by this writer revealed an absence of the usual ecstatic and emotional experiences common in Pentecostal churches. The people simply prayed and they prayed vigorously, clenching their fists, pounding the air, stamping their feet on the ground as a sign of vehemence against the devil and its cohorts responsible for their misfortunes. They prayed in response to the prayer points raised by the man of God, the General Overseer, Dr. Daniel Olukoya, who earlier on the service had exhorted them from the New Testament text, Mark 8:22-26 on the theme ‘Dealing with the spirit of Bethsaida.’

In his sermon, he emphasised the importance of location in the fulfilment of one’s purpose or destiny in life. According to him, there are Christians who are presently in wrong churches that do not emphasize deliverance. He cited the case of a man who belonged to one of the holiness churches around but was living in bondage and tormented in his dreams by a fair in complexion woman who always come into his room to have sex with him in the night. It was not until he came to the MFM Church that he was delivered. All churches, according to him, are not the same. He alluded to the fact that the town of Bethsaida where Jesus healed the blind man was not merely a geographical location, but actually a spirit. This was why Jesus led the man away from the town before he was able to perform the miracle. After he received his sight, Jesus forbade him from returning to the town. Therefore, Bethsaida is a spirit that every Christian has and must be delivered from. Bethsaida spirit represents a cursed environment, continuous satanic attack, angels of darkness feigning to be angels of light, spirit of retrogression responsible for drawbacks in life, barriers to achievements and success in life, bad company or relationships, bondages, miracle aborters, stubborn

breakthrough resisters, charms and wicked spirits operating in fathers’ houses etc. To these, he urged the members to pray to dislodge the spirit of Bethsaida.

He asked them to pray in this manner, ‘O God, deliver me from my Bethsaida!’ And the people began to pray. They prayed jabbing at imaginary enemies as they were made to understand in the sermon. They were encouraged by the man of God not to pray silently as the devil is not a gentle sort, and the stubborn spirit of Bethsaida will not let go easily. The members resumed their prayer, praying violently shaking their heads and bodies as an evidence of the seriousness of the spiritual warfare they were engaged in.

This particular experience in the church revealed the pattern of hermeneutics in the MFM and in some other AICs, where meanings are read into Bible texts and the word of God taking at its face value. Such Bible interpretations appeal to Nigerians because it makes Bible narratives and characters resonate in their local African context. They are able to connect their own situations to bible texts literally and apply the same without seeking for what may be considered as an appropriate interpretation. The word of God is made alive in their context as they are not particularly interested in what is before the text or after the text, but how the text applies to their current realities. This accounts for burgeoning growth of the AICs and newer Pentecostal churches in Nigeria like the MFM.

In a similar vein, Alan Isaacson highlighted the differences between the Western and Nigerian Christian cultures as seen in certain underlying assumptions and ideas in Western Christianity which have no room in Nigerian Christianity. These assumptions include the following:

(a) I don’t believe in miracles;
(b) Dreams aren’t real
(c) There are no such things as demons
(d) Herbalists (local native doctors who are healers and diviners, but may also curse), are never really harmful (if they really exist)
(e) Most illnesses are psychosomatic
(f) There is always a rational explanation.
(g) You can’t take everything in the Bible at its face value
All religions are basically the same.\textsuperscript{40} As regards Bible interpretation, Jenkins is of the opinion that ‘Biblical texts and passages that the South makes central are seen by many Northern churches as marginal, symbolic, or purely historical in nature.’\textsuperscript{41}

Pastor Olukoya addressed the congregation, sharing his thoughts and revelation received about wicked activities of the devil and demons. He expounds from the Bible the activities of the devil and its quest to dominate the world and even the affairs of the Christians. There are works of hidden darkness he says that must be uprooted by all means through concerted prayers. He also spoke about pastors of other churches who were critical about the emphasis and methods of deliverance of the MFM church, but when they became hard-pressed due to the interference of the evil one in their churches, are now resorting to the same methods of MFM church which they once condemned. Deliverance is both imperative and indispensable for the Christian if he/she is to achieve his/her destiny in life because according to him, ‘These are stubborn spirits that can only respond to violent prayers’. At the end of the exhortation he calls for prayer specifying particular prayer points. In response the people pray in unison demanding for the demise of the spirits or agents of destruction who are after their lives, chanting simultaneously ‘Die! Die! Die...’repeatedly. The prayer is rounded up when the pastor shouts ‘...in Jesus name we pray’, and the people chorus ‘Amen’. The process is repeated again with fresh insights from the Bible on activities of the devil and new prayer points. The people are encouraged to pray again attacking the host of darkness, witches, demons etc. On why the MFM prays for the death of enemies, instead of loving them, Olukoya said:

Many things we say at the MFM are not clear to many people. For example, when we say a particular power should die, this baffles so many people. When you carefully check your scriptures, you will find out that it was not always that God pronounces death sentence on anyone. But when it came to the matter of witchcraft, the Bible says that God’s death sentence is upon it. This explains why we always tell certain powers to die. We know that spirits do not die, but when we say, ‘die’, we mean they should become functionless, useless, and disappear.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{40} A Isaacson, \textit{Deeper Life The extraordinary growth of the Deeper Life Bible Church, London:} Hodder and Stoughton, 1990, 20.
\textsuperscript{41} P. Jenkins, \textit{The New Faces of Christianity}, 98.
In one of his publications however, Olukoya narrates an account of the relations of a member who died because they were responsible for her inability to marry. It was during one of the monthly programme, ‘Power Must Change Hands’, that a word of knowledge came forth ‘…about someone there at the programme who, if not released by those in charge of her case, would attend the burial ceremonies of all these adversaries within seven days.’\(^{43}\) One after the other these relations, beginning with her parents began to die. Within an interval of one hour, four people died. Thereafter, the sister got engaged and married within three months. ‘Jesus has killing power. He looked at the fig tree and spoke death to it and the tree died. When one killing force meets another killing force, the lesser killing force must bow…’\(^{44}\) It does not matter therefore if there are spirit beings or human beings that are perceived to be the enemies that have to be done away with. The important thing here is that the victim is released by the evil one from any form of bondage through death of the enemy. Closely related to this is imprecatory prayer. These are prayers said crying for vengeance on their enemies. Prayer here often involves raining curses on perceived enemies responsible for misfortunes or setbacks.

The church recommends always prolong fasting to undo the works of darkness. Fasting here could last for between three to seventy days depending as earlier said, on the gravity of the problem. The array of fruit and soft drink sellers (necessary to break prolong period of fasting) at the headquarters church, creates the impression that fasting is not optional in this setting. It is believed to be a major weapon in the spiritual warfare especially when the victim suffers from ‘stubborn’ spiritual problems that will not go easily except by the means of prolonged prayer and fasting. It is a common practice for pastors in the church to recommend prayers and fasting as a therapy for all manners of problems encountered by the members, and even for those whose physical conditions would not ordinarily allow them to participate in a prolonged prayer and fasting programme. They are encouraged to fast as a means of delivering them from their afflictions. People with physical ailments which in this context are attributed to spiritual causes seldom get referrals to the hospitals. They are taken care by the church and provided for throughout their stay in the healing and deliverance sessions which may last days, weeks or months. Such prolonged programmes often take place at the Prayer City, the MFM camp outside Lagos. The infirmed are left in the care of

seasoned pastors who are versed in the art of prayer and deliverance. Orthodox medicines are hardly used, but simply prayer and fasting for deliverance. The church also provides opportunity for one to one counselling through a special service entitled C.A.R.E, an acronym for compassion, affirmation, restoration and encouragement.

Individuals are also encouraged to practice the act of self deliverance. In other words, they can pray at home or wherever, without the help of any pastor or church leaders. It is tagged a do-it-yourself prayer of deliverance. This process of self deliverance is facilitated by the use of published prayer books by the General Overseer. These books contain devotional studies on spiritual warfare and often give detailed accounts of the enemies’ activities in depriving the ignorant of blessings, fruitfulness, productivity, joy, success etc, through clairvoyance, witchcraft, ancestral spirits, and other sources that are ubiquitous in the African society. Each section or paragraph of the prayer book is punctuated by a long list of prayers attacking the source of the problems affecting the individual’s health and well being that are often linked to one’s family background, ancestry or negative past often referred to as ‘bad foundation.’

The one to be delivered is expected to recite the cited scriptures and pray with all vehemence or aggression and sometimes violently as a sign of anger at the wicked spirits who have brought about misfortunes on the individual. Some of the books list instructions on how to go about the practice of self deliverance as contained below:

1. Locate your area of need by looking at the table of contents.
2. Select appropriate scriptures promising you what you desire. Meditate on them and let them sink into your spirit.
3. Go about the prayers in any of the following ways as led by the Holy Spirit:
   a. Three days’ night vigil, i.e., praying from 10:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. for three consecutive nights.
   b. Three days’ fast (breaking daily), i.e. praying at intervals and breaking the fast at 6:00 p.m. or 9:00 p.m. daily
   c. Seven days’ night vigil, i.e., praying from 10:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. for seven consecutive nights.
   d. Seven days’ fast (breaking daily), i.e., praying at intervals and breaking the fast at 6:00 p.m. or 9:00 p.m. daily.
e. Three or more days of dry fast, i.e., praying and fasting three or more days without any food or drink.

f. Pray aggressively\textsuperscript{45}

4.5 Evaluation

Some Nigerian theologians have reacted to some of these healing practices that tend to see everything from the perspective of spiritual warfare and the tendency to demonize everything relating to African culture. Oborji, a Nigerian Catholic theologian for example, laments the proliferation of the healing churches on this account. He said:

What is serious about this situation is that with the appearance of these churches, the true Christian faith of some Africans has been endangered since they are now practicing their faith in these distorted churches; there is also the possibility for syncretism to arise, because they consider it impossible for the Western established churches to give a valid answer to their daily problem. This is the great challenge which evangelization and inculturation of the Christian faith has brought to Africa today.\textsuperscript{46}

He also contests the claim that AICs represent a true African religiosity on which the inculturation of the Christian faith in the continent could anchor. Rather, he posits that AICs thrive on ignorance as he said “...the ordinary people’s lack of knowledge of the riches found in knowing Christ and believing in his church might partly account for the flourishing of the independent churches in Africa today.”\textsuperscript{47} He blames the proliferation of healing churches not only on ignorance, but also on the tendency of Africans to see all illnesses as having their roots in evil forces rather than physiological reasons. Besides he queries the AICs concept of suffering, where suffering, like in the MFM context is regarded as evil, a punishment that may be traced to one’s ancestry or misdeeds of the past in one’s lineage that must be exorcized. As a Catholic theologian, Oborji believes that human suffering has its salvific value as it draws the sufferer closer to God and works of piety. Olukoya however sees


\textsuperscript{46} Francis O. Oborji \textit{Towards A Christian Theology of African Religion Issues of Interpretation and Mission}, 146.

suffering as a season of life for the believer, a passing phase that must be endured, but which can be vitiated by concerted prayers and fasting. He reasons:

Suffering means distress, anguish, trial and all forms of problems that are unpleasant to the human body, soul and spirit. The saints who have gone ahead of us had at one time or the other experienced their own time of suffering. Therefore suffering is unavoidable...Do you want to be a champion? If yes, you must pass through a season of affliction and suffering. ‘I will never suffer’ is a false religion of modern day Christians. The Scripture teaches that you must partake in Christ’s sufferings...Some believers write themselves off when passing through affliction and suffering. This type of Christians do not realise that affliction is for short time and that it will soon pass away.\(^\text{48}\)

Suffering according to teachings in the new generation churches as the MFM as explained above is a period of test that is certainly rewarded by God, and all who have been rich, successful and influential in the Bible have undergone their periods of testing. The expectations of suffering as a prerequisite for discipleship, is a recurrent theme in the tradition or teachings of Jesus as noted by James Dunn.\(^\text{49}\) For the followers of Christ who are inheritors of the kingdom of God, sufferings in this world by way of rejection and persecutions are inevitable, because ‘...the disciple is not greater than the master.’ Dunn refers to the inevitability of suffering as the terms of discipleship, which involves hardship and total commitment to the cause of Christ.\(^\text{50}\) This is a far cry from what obtains in African Pentecostalism and in some AIC churches like the MFM where the dominant teaching is on how to live a life of bliss and prosperity, free from all the worries, pains and difficulties prevalent in one’s environment.

In addition, the MFM church has come to narrow the Christian faith to only deliverance and spiritual warfare. Members come away with an orientation that all about Christianity is exorcism and a need-oriented Christology, where Christians are always implored to make demands on the name of Jesus and all the benefits they can derive, and not seek to enrich the lives of others through aspects of discipleship that emphasize on demonstrating love. It is a narrow gauge Christian emphasis that demonizes virtually all human experience and proffers spiritual solution only in exorcism. As a corollary, the doctrine of grace is unwittingly denied

\(^{50}\) J.D.G. Dunn, *Christianity in the Making Jesus Remembered, Vol.1*, 419.
as members are frequently subjected to acts of personal denial, praying and fasting, as though that is what obtains salvation for them. The work of Christ is diminished in this setting by the overarching emphasis on deliverance and what the individual can do for himself through the process of self deliverance. Deliverance theology supersedes, as it were, Christological emphasis in the MFM church and people have come to associate the church with this type of theology rather than Christ of the theology. Many are becoming wary of what they aptly described as the ‘fall down and die’ theology (referring to process of exorcizing demons and witches) and are moving to newer Pentecostal churches with emphasis on spiritual development and prosperity.

Another criticism levelled against the MFM Church is her anti-ecumenism stance as the leadership of the MFM openly condemns churches whose theology is at variance with the deliverance theology they subscribe to. This, according to some Christian leaders in the country does negate the high priestly prayer of Jesus Christ who prayed to God to the father that his disciples be one. Does the MFM emphasis on deliverance theology preclude Christ’s emphasis on the oneness of the church? Besides this, can it be assumed that the Christology emphasised by the AICs and Pentecostal churches is best suited for the African Christian context as against the that of the historic churches that is Western oriented and other worldly? It can be deduced that the prime reason for the growth of churches other than the mission churches is the emphasis on signs and wonders and existential concerns of the people; and the Christology emphasised is one of power and victory over malignant spirits.