

THE SPREAD OF APOSTOLICISM TO AFRICA

The Azusa Street revival lasted for about three years. People came from all over the world to witness what was going on. Meetings continued through the night as hundreds came to receive the blessing of the Baptism in the Spirit. Soon, there began to appear in different localities, places of worship wherein the gifts of the spirit were manifested, designating themselves by such names as: the Apostolic Faith Mission, Pentecostal Mission, Apostolic Faith Assembly, Full Gospel Assembly or Mission, Assembly of God, Pentecostal Assemblies of the World etc., with their common aim being to earnestly contend for the faith, which was once delivered unto the Saints. Since that momentous outpouring of the spirit on Azusa Street, followers of the apostolic faith and doctrine have become prominent through great revivals that appeared in Great Britain, United States, and Canada. Men such as Charles Finney, D.L Moody and R.A Torrey had great influence on both sides of the Atlantic because of their association with various Pentecostal movements.

Apostolicism in The United Kingdom

The Apostolic Faith, or the Pentecostals as some prefer to call them, did not do very well in the United Kingdom until the early sixties. The Pentecostals were weaker in the United Kingdom than in the USA, and initially suffered more persecution and ostracism. But from 1962 onwards, there was a steady increase in support for the Pentecostals in the United Kingdom. Minds previously shut completely to this subject have become open, even though many were cautious and unwilling to commit themselves in support or opposition. Notable speakers like David Du Plessis and Frank Maquire visited Britain to speak at various meetings to arouse the interest of British Christians on what was happening across the Atlantic.

However, it was the visit of Dr. Philip Hughes to America in 1962, which started the Pentecostal Movement in the United Kingdom. Dr Hughes, an Anglican theologian, was profoundly impressed by what he saw in the USA. He attended prayer meetings of some of prayer groups and spoke at length with Christian leaders such as Mrs. Jane Stone. He was gratified to notice that everything was done decently and in order and in full conformity with the instruction given by Paul in 1 Cor. 12 and 14. In his own words, he wrote he had “a flirtation under the hot California sun with the extravagance of Pentecostalism” but now that he had seen it for himself, he has realised that half the story about Pentecostalism had not been told him. Dr. Hughes wrote an enthusiastic editorial on what was happening in the theological journal the “*Churchman*”. Dr. Hughes’s estimate of the situation in the USA and coming from the pen of such a sane and balanced theologian caused many to sit up and notice. He disarmed the prejudices of many by this forthright editorial.

The spread of Apostolicism in West Africa

In 1916, a group calling themselves the Apostolics split from the main Pentecostal group and established their headquarters in Pennygroes, South Wales - the home of their leader Dan Powel Williams. The Apostolics were very keen on missionary work from the beginning and therefore sent a quite number of missionaries into Africa and Asia. Their pioneering missionary efforts saw phenomenal growth and many moves of the Lord. These missionaries were largely responsible for the spread of Apostolicism in West Africa. Notable among these missionaries was the Irish preacher Rev James Mckweon.

Just as it was in Europe and North America, the renewal that the Pentecostal Movement brought was initially looked upon with mistrust by the historic Churches. Some of them went to the extent of branding it satanic, warning their members to have nothing to do with it. Others, with caution neither criticized nor were open to it. However, the transformed lives and the sense of the nearness and reality of God, which was characteristic of the Pentecostals, became contagious and soon infected some of the clergy and members of these Churches. Pentecostalism, in this manner, also gradually crept into the historic Churches, eventually resulting in what became known as the Neo-Pentecostal or the Charismatic movement.

In 1953, Dr. Thomas Wyatt, an American missionary visited the Ghana, which was then called the Gold Coast. Dr. Wyatt, was a revivalist preacher from Oregon, who in 1954 pioneered the first ever-Christian healing program on radio. He was also involved in a Pentecostal movement called the Latter Rain Movement, which he had started in Canada and was one of the precursors of the charismatic movement. The Latter Rain mission brought an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and a restoration of the five-fold ministry of Apostles, Prophets, Pastors, Evangelists and Teachers to Ghana. These developments brought the Latter Rain Mission on a collision course with the Apostolics Headquarters in Bradford, United Kingdom.

In the same year, two Bradford apostolic missionaries, Adam McKeown and Cecil Coussen, were sent to Canada as missionaries. In Canada, they heard Dr. Wyatt preached on faith there and their entire life and ministries were transformed. They were so impressed by what they saw that they decided to send a team, headed by Dr. Wyatt to the Gold Coast and Nigeria. The rest of the team was made up of Adam McKeown, Fred Poole and Stanley Hammond (who was already an Apostolic Missionary in the Gold Coast). The result was a phenomenal growth of the apostolic faith throughout West Africa. In fact, the Apostolic faith flourished in West Africa far more than it did in the UK; there are less than 200 British Apostolic assemblies while there are as many as 3,000 Apostolic Churches in Nigeria and over 1,000 in Ghana.

Conclusion

Thus in Ghana and most African countries, Pentecostalism and its precursor's movements were on the fringes of society in the 20th Century. However, with the advent of the colonization process and its completion in the late fifties, apostolicism and its precursor movements moved into the center, crossing into every branch of the Church in most African countries. With Pentecostalism came the charismatic movements that have given a new face to Christianity, which is outwardly expressive, inwardly liberating, and which provides adequate identity of a faith that can be truly Christian and truly African and which appropriately respond to the existential needs of the African. This is the reason why in most African Countries, the apostolic movement, which emerged only in the 1950, is fast becoming the most significant expression of Christianity on the continent, especially, in the cities. In fact, we cannot understand Christianity in Africa today without also understanding the origins of revivals and renewals that have brought about the Apostolic Faith.