

**FAITH BASED ORGANIZATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF AN  
AFRICAN INDIGENOUS CHURCH'S GLOBAL REACH-- THE REDEEMED  
CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF GOD**

By Dele Olowu

Contribution to the *Religion and Development* Volume being edited by Gerrie ter Haar,  
Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, Netherlands

When some people think or hear of religion, their immediate reference point is the destructive aspects of religious organizations in the modern world—the Catholic vs. Protestant battles in Ireland, the skirmishes between the different adherents of Islam in Iraq and the destruction of the New York Twin Towers by Islamic extremists on September 11, 2001. It takes a bit more reflection to see the positive legacy of the main religions to modern civilization: the contribution of Islam to modern scholarship: literature and the sciences, especially mathematics; being the first to establish a world university at Al Fazah in Cairo, Egypt); and the role of Christianity in shaping the development of science, industrialization and governance in Europe and other western countries, as attested by several scholars, including Max Weber (1976).

This paper does not attempt to engage the above issues. Rather, it tries to engage the development discourse in the context of its present secularist orientation, which leaves faith out of all discourse on development even though there is a universal recognition that man is not only matter but is made up of body, soul and spirit. The absence of a serious spiritual engagement in the development discourse makes it difficult to approach development from a

holistic paradigm in which all aspects of human growth possibilities are incorporated. Given the state of our economies and societies at the present time, any serious discussion of holistic development must include not only the material but also the spiritual. There is a growing conviction that this consideration of the spiritual is essential both in scholarly and policy circles. Last year, the Netherlands government articulated a new draft policy on religion and development. In the first half of this paper, I discuss this document.

My entry point is therefore not a meta-theoretical discourse on religion—I must leave that to theologians (and I do not pretend to be one)—but from two angles: The first is from a policy angle, and the second is from a practical empirical case study of an indigenous African Christian organization, established with the primary objective of ministering to the spiritual needs of people in one of Africa's poor countries, Nigeria. Its success in incorporating social and economic activities in its programmes without losing its vibrancy as a spiritual organization like many older, more established church organisations did is a cause for celebration but also for enquiry.

## **1. Religion and Development: Analysis of an Emerging Dutch Government Policy.**

In May 2008, the Netherlands Knowledge Forum for Religion and Development Policy put together a 'Handout on Religion and Development Policy'. It was the outcome of a joint initiative between governmental and non-government agencies, namely, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and nine Dutch non-governmental organisations<sup>1</sup>. Perhaps the most important point in this report is its contention that religion is particularly relevant in development discourse and practice because of its growing importance in developing or poor countries. On the other hand, the paper holds to the classical position, contending that as development increases in a society the influence of religion wanes, as has been the case in the Netherlands and other Western countries. This, of course, is not wholly correct. For a variety of reasons, there is a revival of religion in the Netherlands, as in other Western countries. Many scholars and policy makers have called for a rethinking of the classical position. For a variety of reasons, old and young people are renewing interest in Eastern and Western religions, as a special issue of *Time Magazine* (February 7, 2000) tells us. The *Economist* did a special report on 'Religion and Public Life' (November 3, 2007) that underscored the growing importance of religion in world politics. The report tried to find out why religion's influence has been increasing globally whether in Western politics, where religion has found its way into the public arena (it cited the United States since its first born-again Christian president, Jimmy Carter and the then-incumbent, George Bush II, who began each cabinet meeting with a prayer); or in Iran where Ayatollah Khomeini replaced the Shah; or in India, Israel, Pakistan, the former Soviet countries, Sri Lanka, and indeed Western Europe. Religion, rather than

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<sup>1</sup> Cordaid, ICCO, Kerk in Actie, Hivos, IKV Pax Christi, Oikos, Seva, Prisma,

decline with modernization, has found new life and is drawing growing numbers of followers around the world.

I quote a long paragraph from an article that appeared in *Foreign Affairs* March/April 2008:112):

*The reappearance of public religion on the world stage has complex implications. Religion has both bolstered and undermined self-government. It has advanced political reform and human rights but also induced irrationality, persecution, extremism and terrorism. Radical Islam may dominate the headlines, but the importance of religion is hardly confined to Muslim-majority countries or the Muslim diaspora. An explosion of religious devotion among Chinese citizens increasingly worries communist officials. Religious ideas and actors affect the fate of democracy in Russia, relations between the nuclear powers India and Pakistan, and the consolidation of democracy in Latin America. Even in Western Europe—which has seen itself as a laboratory for secularisation—religion, in the form of Islam and pockets of Christian revival, simply will not go away. The world is overflowing with religious communities, theologies and movements—with very public consequences. Two leading demographers of religion concluded that demographic trends coupled with conservative estimates of conversions and defections envision over 80% of the world's population will become affiliated to religions 200 years into the future (Farr 2008: 112).*

Focussing on the Christian religious growth across the world, missiologists such as Peter Wagner (2004:8-9) have concluded that there have been fundamental changes in the tempo and direction of missionary activities around the world. Whereas in the past Western countries

sent missionaries to different parts of the world, especially the Dark continent, the churches in the latter are now sending missionaries to post-Christian societies around the world. One such institution that he singled out was the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), which by then had planted 150 churches in the United States, with many of these having over five hundred members. According to Wagner, of the six continents, Africa at that time had the most accelerated rate of church growth at 2.62 percent per year compared with Asia (including China) at 2.12 percent or America at 0.81 percent. The international head of RCCG, Pastor E.A. Adeboye, was recognised in December 2008 by *Newsweek* magazine, a secular global weekly that is published in the United States, as one of the fifty global elites.

*Newsweek* senior editor, Lisa Miller, writes about Pastor Adeboye:

*You may never have heard of E. A. Adeboye, but the pastor of The Redeemed Christian Church of God is one of the most successful preachers in the world. He boasts that his church has outposts in 110 countries. He has 14,000 branches—claiming 5 million members—in his home country of [Nigeria](#) alone. There are 360 RCCG churches in Britain, and about the same number in U.S. cities like Chicago, Dallas, and Tallahassee, Fla. Adeboye says he has sent missionaries to China and such Islamic countries as Pakistan and Malaysia. His aspirations are outsize. He wants to save souls, and he wants to do so by planting churches the way Starbucks used to build coffee shops: everywhere.*

*"In the developing world we say we want churches to be within five minutes' walk of every person," he tells NEWSWEEK. "In the developed world, we say five minutes of driving." Such a goal may seem outlandish, but Adeboye is a Pentecostal preacher: he believes in miracles. And Pentecostalism is the biggest, fastest-growing Christian movement since the Reformation.*

The same writer pointed out that “the world now has about 600 million Pentecostals, the largest group of Christians after Roman Catholics. In Asia, the number of Pentecostals has grown from about 10 million to 166 million since 1970, according to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary [with most of the growth coming from the unorthodox and unlicensed Chinese churches]. In Latin America, Pentecostals have expanded from 13 million to 151 million; in North America, from 19 million to 77 million; and in Africa, from 18 million to 156 million.” The article also notes that according to estimates by Professor Grant Wacker at Duke University, by 2050 most of Africa will be Christian and most of those Christians will be Pentecostals.

The rest of this paper tries to describe and explain the rise of one of these indigenous African Christian organizations, the RCCG and its growing capacity to draw a following not in Nigeria and Africa only but globally, and especially in the Western world and in Western Europe in particular. Without pre-empting the work of a group of researchers who are studying the RCCG phenomenon in three European countries (England, Netherlands and Germany),<sup>2</sup> it is important to understand why a religious organisation has found relevance globally not only in terms of saving souls but also in undertaking a range of socio-economic development activities. We also underscore how the organization has found a base in the Netherlands and Western Europe generally, a continent that, as was mentioned above, is understood by some as a post-Christian society.

## **2. The Redeemed Christian Church of God—an Indigenous African Pentecostal church with a difference**

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<sup>2</sup> This group’s work is being coordinated in the Netherlands at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam. Information on the work can be obtained from [www.glopent.net](http://www.glopent.net), (Key contact is Dr. Kim Knibbe).

The Redeemed Christian Church of God started from very humble beginnings by an illiterate African peasant who had a vision from the Lord that he should start a church that will prepare the world for the second coming of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He was to start the new church based on a divine covenant in which this peasant would faithfully teach and practice the scriptures while the Lord ensured that miracles followed the ministry as they did the ministry of the early church.

As this man was uneducated in western ways--he could neither read nor write--many of his educated hearers thought that his concept of the world might be limited to his nation, Nigeria. Miraculously, today the church that was started in 1952 by this man who died in 1980, is operating in over 113 nations of the earth in all continents of the world. Its pastors are drawn from all of these nationalities and many are very well educated. They include bank directors, high level political and civil servants, professors and ambassadors, medical doctors and all sorts of professionals. This paper will detail the development activities of what might be one of the world's fastest growing Christian organisations. The hub of these activities revolves around the missionary thrust of the church and especially of the 'Africa Missions' organisation that is active in many African countries presently.

RCCG has grown phenomenally in Great Britain—in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. The twice-yearly Festival of Life currently draws between thirty and fifty thousand people for an all-night prayer meeting at the Excel Centre in London. Attendants represent numerous nationalities and Christian denominational backgrounds.. Similar meetings are organised on other parts of the British Isles. While this can be simplistically understood as a reflection of the fact that Britain colonised Nigeria and is therefore receiving a return of Christian missionary impulse that she sowed in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, it is significant that RCCG

has also grown steadily in countries in mainland Western Europe. Table 1 lists the number of RCCG parishes in continental Europe as at the end of December 2008.

Altogether, there are almost 130 parishes presently on the mainland and the total membership strength is above six thousand worshippers. The numbers in Great Britain and North America are even much higher since those areas have a larger Nigerian population and the church membership more often than not comprises a large number of Nigerians in diaspora.

However, there are some exceptions to this general rule. RCCG has attracted Europeans married to Africans in large numbers. In Spain, there is a wholly Spanish-speaking congregation. A few other parishes exist in different European Mainland countries with substantial populations of persons from the West Indies, Surinam and Nederland Antilles, etc., who have associated closely with the RCCG work in Europe. In particular, young Europeans are finding true Christian fellowship in RCCG churches that they could not find in their original churches, which often do not believe the Bible to be God's word. The Belgian RCCG, for instance, has a substantial number of Flemish-speaking church and board members. There is also a strong church of Iranian peoples with an Iranian pastor. In most of the other churches, most members are Africans or peoples of African descent, and many are Nigerians. It is, however, wholly incorrect to designate these churches as 'Nigerian churches', as some media in the host countries have tried to do.

### **3. History and Main Achievements of RCCG**

Max Diamant, a respected historian of the Jewish people, argued that of the various approaches to studying history, the most relevant for the study of Jewish people is that of religious interpretation of history. This approach emphasises the notion that ideas motivate man and that it is these ideas (scientific or non-scientific) that create history. The Redeemed



Christian Church of God (RCCG) can rightly be labelled as an ideas movement. Sourced wholly from indigenous roots in Nigeria, the founder of the church, Josiah Akindayomi, claimed that the Lord gave him a covenant in 1952 to establish a church that will be a model for Christianity in the last days<sup>3</sup>. Akindayomi (called Pa Akindayomi by members), who could not read or write, was given a vision of words that appeared on a blackboard. The words were "The Redeemed Christian Church of God", which he copied and gave to one of his relations who was literate. It turned out to be the name currently borne by the church.

According to the founder of RCCG, God assured him during the visitation that this church would go to the ends of the earth and that when the Lord Jesus Christ returned to earth, the church would still be around. The covenant that the Lord established with Pa Akindayomi was analogous to the Abrahamic covenant in the Bible: God would meet all the needs of the church in an awesome way if only members would serve Him faithfully and be obedient to His Word. It is upon this covenant that the Redeemed Christian Church of God was built.

The baton of leadership passed on to Pastor Enoch Adeboye in 1981 after the death of Pa Akindayomi. The Lord had told the latter even before Pastor Adeboye became born-again or ever came to the church that the Lord had shown him the person who will take over from him and that he was not yet in the church at that time. When Pastor Adeboye eventually joined the church in 1973 the founder announced that the person had come but never informed anyone until 1979 when they both travelled to attend a Kenneth Hagin Convention in the United States. This choice remained secret to the rest of the membership however until the founder died. The whole manner in which leadership transfer took place has been scripted into screen play (Dove Media 2006). What was outstanding about this was that Pastor Adeboye was a

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<sup>3</sup> 'Last days' refer to the return of Christ as prophesied by the Bible and the Lord Jesus Himself that He would return to take His own away and judge the world.

relatively newcomer into the church. He was perhaps best known for serving as the founder's translator from the Yoruba language into English as the number of English-speaking persons in the church increased.

Pastor Adeboye, unlike most of the twelve persons with whom Pa Akindayomi founded the church in 1952, was young, educated in western ways and a senior lecturer in mathematics at one of Nigeria's federal universities. Since the time that the mantle was passed to him in 1981, an explosion of the church began with the number of parishes growing in leaps and bounds. Today, RCCG is reputed to be the fastest-growing Pentecostal church with over 6,000 parishes in 113 countries . In Nigeria alone, there are over 20,000 parishes. Between 2007 and 2008, the church in Nigeria grew by over 2500 new parishes.

On the international scene, the church is present in other African nations including Cameroon, Cote D'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zaire, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In the United Kingdom, there are over 385 parishes; in Ireland, 71; and in the Netherlands, 19. In the rest of Europe, the church is spread in Austria, Belgium, Czech, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. There are over 6,000 worshippers in mainland Europe alone. Similarly, in the United States, there are 294 parishes in cities such as Chicago, Dallas, Houston, Tallahassee, New York and Washington. Also, there are 4 parishes in the Caribbean countries of Haiti and Jamaica. Canada has 41 parishes.

One of the well-known programs of the church is the Holy Ghost Service, an all-night miracle service<sup>4</sup> that holds on the first Friday of every month at the Redemption Camp on the Lagos-

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<sup>4</sup> These are monthly all-night services at which many people are healed or receive prophetic word that come to pass in their lives after the service. They return to give the testimonies at subsequent meetings.

Ibadan expressway. The average headcount of those who attend the service stands in excess of 250,000. But this is child's play compared to the Holy Ghost Congress that takes place annually at the same venue for one full week in December every year. Over five million people attended the last one (2008). The Holy Ghost Service now also holds in London biannually; in Europe and Ireland once every two years and in the USA (and Canada) once a year.

This section examines the strong growth of the mission from the Yoruba communities in which it was born to the larger Nigerian community and to the international scene.

It is instructive that this church was until 1970 a very local, Yoruba-speaking church with its presence mainly confined to its place of founding in Lagos and a few other Yoruba cities. For the first twenty-eight years of its existence, RCCG had only thirty-nine branches all in the south-western (Yoruba) parts of Nigeria. Its annual convention drew less than a thousand persons (Ukah2008)

Most outside observers who have studied the church's evolution are struck by the fact that the church encountered fundamental changes with the change of leadership in 1981. The new leader had been in the church for only eight years when he was given the mantle of leadership, while those who founded the church were still alive and active in the church. It was predictable that a major succession crisis would arise, and it did, leading to some of these persons leaving the church. In spite of this, the church rose to new heights as the new leader (only thirty-nine years old at the time) led the church through a number of remarkable

transformations as led by the Holy Spirit who has always been the main focus of attention in this church. A few of these innovations are mentioned below.

First, evangelism became a high priority of the church. It was institutionalised to reach all sectors of the society. Whereas the church used to focus on the poor and downtrodden, the new leadership encouraged reaching out to all segments of the society with specialised programmes such as campus evangelism, leading to student branches of RCCG being established in higher institutions of learning across Nigeria; breakfast/dinner meetings were organised for the rich and upwardly mobile in big hotels under the banner of CRFU—Christ the Redeemers' Friends Universal. This was patterned after the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship of Demos Shakarian of the United States. In addition, special churches tagged model churches were introduced in Nigeria's big cities to present the gospel in a manner that professionals and middle and upper classes can listen and respond .

Second, whereas under the old leadership, music was solemn and drums, clapping and shows of emotion were discouraged, the new leadership taught that exuberant praise was essential to worship and that all instruments of praise must be engaged.

Thirdly, whereas the concern of the old leadership for holiness meant that no one was asked to contribute financially to the church during the church programmes (the result of course was that most pastors were poor and the church could barely maintain itself), the new leadership taught that members were to give if they wanted the Lord to give to them. Such concepts as tithing (the payment of a tenth of one's income to the Lord), offerings—freewill giving to the Lord to support His work, 'first-fruits'—giving of one's first salary at a new job, were all instituted according to the teachings of the Bible. In addition, whereas only males were

ordained into the pastorate, under the new order, women were ordained as well. But perhaps the most important innovation was the training of the pastorate. Pastors continued to be trained in biannual pastoral meetings as they performed their assignments and they returned to their parishes to train the workers who were the volunteer staff of every church. This arrangement worked well in two important senses: the church had access to high quality, trained, non-paid staff that could take the gospel to all corners of the earth and into all professions. At the same time, they cost the church very little and made the church mobile—as the leadership became upwardly mobile from low classes to middle and upper classes. Fourthly, with time, a progressive and deliberate effort was made to modernise church organisation. Before, the church had no budget and anyone could qualify to become a pastor, based solely on spiritual calling and qualification. Under the new leadership, a stronger emphasis was laid on minimum educational qualifications. Within a short while, it became established that only members with university degrees or its equivalent could become senior or provincial pastors. Others could become secretaries and elders as part of the administrative cadre but not senior pastors. This was to reflect the increasing quality of membership in the church.

Finally, perhaps the most important innovation was the increasing interest in economic and social services. This interest began in an effort to meet needs as they emerged among members all over the world as the church grew phenomenally. This is the subject of the next section of this paper.

#### **4. Evolution of Missions and Development Activities of RCCG**

At its founding, RCCG was focussed exclusively on meeting the spiritual needs of members and others in the wider society. One of the constantly heard statements in the church at the time was, “God is interested in your soul.” All efforts were geared to saving souls. Over time, however, the church became concerned about the economic and social conditions of its members and also of those it had been called to minister to in the countries to which it went.

African Missions is an initiative of Folu Adeboye, the wife of the present leader of RCCG. She was an educator before she and her husband joined the work of the mission on a full-time basis. In 1996 she visited some mission fields in West Africa and came back with a burden to help these missions and their host communities. This burden gave birth to the West Africa Mission Committee, a group focussing primarily on supporting and reaching out to mission fields in West Africa. In 1997, after a similar trip to the Central, Eastern and Southern parts of Africa, the group was renamed Africa Missions, with all of Africa as its focus. Today, there are six chapters of Africa Missions in Canada, Europe, Ireland, Nigeria, the United Kingdom and USA. The corporate headquarters is in Nigeria.

Africa Missions (AM) is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) set to transform the quality of life in Africa through sustainable development programs, which focus on families with special reference to the more vulnerable segments of the society. So far, the areas of intervention of AM in different parts of Africa include but are not limited to providing potable water; establishing schools, hospitals and transportation schemes; rehabilitating drug addicts and commercial sex workers; providing empowerment strategies for youths and women; HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment programs; and providing libraries and books.

AM is a faith-based welfare organization that has metamorphosed into a non-governmental organization with a widened scope and horizon. It is premised on the idea of catering for the total man—body, soul and spirit—to make for a truly holistic and sustainable development.

The objectives of AM (as articulated on its website) are:

- promote the spread of the gospel in Africa and around the world
- promote the development of sustainable holistic programmes in Africa and around the world
- provide services that will improve the quality of life of children, youths and families around the world.

AM's six chapters meet in the United Kingdom to review their programmes in November every year ahead of the second Festival of Life. Of these chapters, the Nigerian chapter is the most advanced.

Africa Missions Nigeria has undertaken several projects from her time of inception to date. Whilst a significant number of them are capital projects, others are recurrent expenditures such as the payment of teacher salaries, administrative expenses and other operational costs of feeding and caring for pupils. The construction of church buildings, classroom blocks, clinic/maternalities, staff quarters and student dormitories has been a major focus of the mission. These projects constitute part of the basic infrastructural facilities needed by these communities in order to establish a sustainable development framework for them to thrive.

Below is a list of these projects:

- Construction of a place of worship at Port Novo, in Benin Republic
- Building of classroom blocks at the School of Missions in Ede
- Erection of hostel room, classroom blocks and staff quarters for the first primary schools in Koma Hills.
- Procurement of two out board engine boats for the Bakassi Communities in Cross River State; with a seating capacity of fourteen persons each.
- Others range from the purchase of motorcycles, bicycles and vehicles as assistance to the missionaries or local communities at the various project sites.
- Building of a maternity center at Bakassi Peninsular.
- Provision of scholarship for Bible College students and students of the School of Mission, Ede.
- Building of a place of worship in Allada, Benin Republic.
- Provision of boreholes and potable water in Maiduguri, Borno State.

Presently, the Mission has made a current budget plan for the under-listed projects for this fiscal year:

- sinking of bore holes in Koma Hills, Damaturu Kwambla and Gwoza
- extension of dormitories in Tantille, Kwambla and Gadaka
- construction of class room blocks in Gadaka Kwambla and Ngalda
- establishment of a sachet water factory in Damaturu
- building of a health center/maternity in Amuda
- equipments and furniture for the established primary schools
- construction of a medical centre for Koma Hills and Atagara
- development of permanent site for the nursery and primary schools in Kwambla
- provision of motor cycles for transportation



- establishment of a cooperative poultry and animal husbandry cattle ranch at Barawa, Borno and Kwambila
- reconstruction of worship centers in Arapagi and Araromi communities in the riverine suburbs of Lagos state.
- provision of hostels and workshops for Christ Against Drug Abuse Ministry (CADAM), Poka Epe in Lagos state.

Africa Missions United Kingdom maintains an orphanage of thirty children in Lusaka, Zambia. It also has a farm and is planning to set up another sixty-children orphanage in the same country. In addition, Africa Missions UK has a project that provides medical supplies in Malawi and aid in Mozambique.

Africa Missions Europe has responsibility for Northern African countries. It is also active in other African countries based on need. It is presently active in Tunisia and in Zimbabwe where it supports an orphanage, Tariro House of Hope, which was founded by one of the members of RCCG Netherlands. It plans to support other activities in Ethiopia and some Northern African countries in 2009.

The Canadian chapter is focussed on women and children programmes in Kenya, where they feed children and empower ex-prostitutes. They also have a women's skills development centre in Nairobi. They have a project in Turkana to drill a borehole; they also provide financial support to missionaries, and feed orphans in Obaga.

AM North America has a project feeding the children of Glory School in Lesotho. They have already spent some US\$50,000 on this school project and plan to launch a US\$1million

programme to support their AM operations worldwide. AM Ireland works on similar projects in the Chad, Sudan and Eritrea.

AM is still relatively in its infancy, but it is significant in that it is already developing an institutional structure of its own, as it is a registered charity in all the countries and regions in which it is operating.

It is also noteworthy that all monies expended on AM projects in all regions are raised mainly from church members through love offerings.

We have not mentioned here a few other economic and social programmes of RCCG. These include the creation of community banks in several communities, schools at all levels—nursery, primary, secondary and one university, Redeemers' University (founded three years ago)—and several health clinics, farms and fisheries, etc. Perhaps the most important innovation was the selection of a new site for the headquarters of the global operations at Kilometer 47 on Lagos-Ibadan Expressway. The Mission's huge arena with its huge meeting hall is located here. The hall is 1300 by 500 meters, that is the size of some 78 FIFA standard football fields and the altar alone is estimated as capable of holding ten fifty thousand worshippers-the choir is over 2000 strong.

In the next section we focus on the challenges that the church confronts today.

## **5. Challenges Confronting the RCCG's Global Outreach**

RCCG has successfully confronted a number of challenges, and one of the hallmarks of its success has been the total reliance on the Holy Spirit and the scriptures (Old and New

Testaments) in meeting these challenges. It is expected that this approach will help to resolve some of the new, tough challenges that lie ahead.

### **1. Tension between the old and the new**

This is one tension that the church has managed well up till now. However, greater challenges lie ahead, especially as the church's mission goes abroad. There are pockets of resistance to the leadership, especially among those who perceive the changes spoken of previously as negative in the sense that they take the mission from its original holiness orientation. For instance, there are those who argue that the church does not focus as much as it did on holiness in order to make itself presentable to the middle and upper classes. In particular, many argue that the church should be more critical of the corruption in government, especially since some of the top leadership of the government—in President Obasanjo's time this included the president himself and his ministers and governors etc—frequented the Camp grounds and a few of them claim to be members of the church.

Whereas new members of the church are appreciative of the continuing changes that the mission has undertaken, older members believe that these changes are signs of a decline of the church from its Olympian heights. Having made this point, it is equally necessary to note that the mission's overall mandate has continued to regard making heaven and holiness two of its five-point mission and vision.

### **2. Church planting and consolidation**

Another kind of tension is between church planting and church consolidation. How much time does it take to plant a church? If so many churches are being planted within a short period of time, does it not risk the strength of these churches?

Twice a year, members of the church are required to organise 'Go-a-fishing' programmes. These programmes involve going to new fields to evangelise. The success of such outreaches is judged by the planting of a new church. The church's commitment to church planting is yet to resonate, especially with pastors that see the church as a means of their existence; they feel threatened by the constant requirement for church planting. Some pastors feel that not enough is being done to consolidate the present parishes.

### **3. Resolving the tension between body, soul and spirit**

Another question that has been raised is whether the church is not overemphasising economic and social concerns over the spiritual, a real challenge considering that many denominations started well on the spiritual and ended up becoming social clubs with little interest in the spiritual. This is the state of many established churches in Europe and other countries until the charismatic renewal that has led to some new initiatives in these churches.

### **4. Prospecting another succession crisis**

Pastor Adeboye became General Overseer at the young age of only thirty-nine. Today he is already sixty-seven years old. There are now loud gossips concerning who will take over from him when he passes on. He has appointed some twelve special assistants who provide him with help on several issues, very much like his special advisers. Their role has become more

visible since the older members of the 'Supreme Council' (the highest policy making institution of the church, comprising only 9 members) have been posted to other African countries to oversee the work of the mission and Nigeria continues to remain the major source of support for the mission worldwide.

## **5. Avoiding Institutional Decline and Goal Displacement**

Perhaps the most important challenge is how to ensure that the organisation does not face institutional decline as have many other denominations before it. What is in place to prevent goal displacement? There are those within the church who feel that the desire for higher position and prosperity might be taking over a holiness church. There are also fears that the commitment to social and economic outreach might outweigh the commitment to the spiritual upliftment of the members.

On the other hand, there are also those who worry that there is not sufficient attention to social and economic needs in the church. In particular, they feel that the church is not engaging the issue of social improvement, and especially the fight against corruption, in a society rankled by corruption.

## **6. The Challenge of Integration**

For churches outside Nigeria in particular, perhaps the most important challenge is whether these churches will just be Nigerian churches in diaspora or whether they will actually reach out to the non-Nigerians and non-Africans in their immediate environment. This is not just an

issue of church demographics but also of the readiness of the mission to prepare people for engaging the language and culture of their hosts and earning their trust over time.

## **7. Political Engagement**

There are also those who believe that RCCG should be more active in making a difference to the Nigerian political and social scene given its mass following. This is an important issue as members of the church are occupying positions of political and institutional influence in the country. Moreover, some of the governors and the political appointees regularly attend the Holy Ghost nights. It is expected that over time, the spiritual changes would transpire into social and economic changes as the church develops a robust engagement of the political scene. As at now, the church is preoccupied with the evangelization and the belief is that when the nation has sufficient number of influential citizens in high and low places, there would be a transformation of the polity and society.

In conclusion, while each of these challenges are real, the church has succeeded in meeting most challenges by staying close to the Holy Spirit and the word of God, the scriptures.

Perhaps the most important key to success has been the quality of leadership at national, zonal and parish levels. The state of the church is often a reflection of the quality of its leadership.

**TABLE 1: RCCG PARISHES IN WESTERN EUROPE  
MAINLAND, DECEMBER 2008**

<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>NUMBER OF PARISHES</b>	<b>MEMBERSHIP</b>
1. Austria	3	248
2. Belgium	10	585
3. Denmark	1	150
4. Finland	3	167
5. France	12	264
6. Germany	9	214
7. Greece	2	186
8. Hungary	1	26
9. Italy	21	778
10. Kosovo**	1	8
11. Luxembourg	1	20
12. Netherlands	19	1000
13. Norway	1	73
14. Poland	3	172
15. Portugal	1	35
16. Romania	2	100
17. Spain	26	1907
18. Sweden	7	320
19. Switzerland	3	103
20. Tunisia	1	24
21. Bulgaria*	1	20
22. Russia	1	60
23. Malta**	1	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>6,479</b>

Notes: \* = Based on estimates as it has been difficult to find concrete information on Bulgaria.

\*\* Only a house fellowship exists in Malta and Kosovo. They intend to start as a full-blown church from September 2009.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dele Olowu is the Chairman of the Board of National Coordinators of Redeemed Christian Church of God in mainland Europe. He was formerly professor of Public Administration and Policy and had worked in many universities and higher institutions in Africa, Europe and the United States as a researcher and instructor. He has served as adviser to many African

national governments and many international organisations on African governance and development issues.