

***DESTROYING THE DESTROYER OF YOUR DESTINY***  
***The Role(s) of Pentecostalism in Post-War Liberia***

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A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Groot Hause".

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned primarily with the socio-political role of Pentecostalism in Liberia. This thesis carefully examines the massive growth of Pentecostal churches within the unique post-conflict setting of nearly total social, economic, educational and political collapse in Liberia. A number of arguments have been made by scholars to try to elucidate the socio-political role of Pentecostalism in different contexts. This thesis will evaluate to what extent the Pentecostalism plays any of these roles, and what additional roles it might play.

I argue that the most important aspect to consider in evaluating these roles is that Liberian Pentecostals think about, articulate and act upon all types of this-worldly problems that Liberians are faced with – individual, familial, social and national – in spiritual terms. Amidst the huge variation in churches the common underlying emphasis is that the devil must be defeated and the Holy Spirit embraced in order for problems to be overcome and progress to be made. This attention to spiritually-based solutions for solving this-worldly problems, situated within a clearly dualistic framework provides Liberians with a language in which they can make sense of and talk about these problems, in addition to providing spiritual activities which enable them to feel that they are active in addressing these problems. While these problems are rarely effectively solved; Pentecostals maintain their beliefs and find new explanations and methods of solving their enduring problems. This spiritual idioms used are never constant and even sometimes contradict one another, but they are always practical. A case study of the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission will demonstrate this point in addition to providing examples of what the socio-political implications of Pentecostal spiritual worldviews can be.

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I dedicate this thesis to my, my mother, Mary, who encouraged me to question reality.

*Gwendolyn Heaner*

*London, December 2010*

## ***INTRODUCTION***

My motivation for pursuing a PhD that deals with Pentecostalism in Africa stemmed from two broad questions. First, I had a fascination with the huge growth of Pentecostalism around the world and wanted to explore more what it is about Pentecostalism that makes it so popular in such different cultural contexts. Second, through my years of studying religion, I became certain that one must consider the religious worldviews of people in order to fully understand the wider socio-political climate in which they live. Though many studies have been conducted that deal with these questions, there had been none that considered a country that had been ruined by war. I wanted to explore what the unique role(s) of Pentecostalism might be in such a context, and thus decided to conduct fieldwork in Liberia.

The research for this thesis was undertaken from September 2007 until July 2008, in May 2009, and July 2010, primarily in the capital, Monrovia, though at least twenty trips were taken outside of Monrovia to measure any major differences between the urban and rural contexts. I assumed the role of participant-observer in three Monrovia churches that I decided upon as case-studies: Winners' Chapel, Sinkor United Pentecostal Church (SUPC) and Christian Evangelistic Pentecostal Church and Ministry (CEPC/CHRISEM). I spent most of my time attending services and conversing with and interviewing countless members of the selected churches. I became a virtual insider, being included in every activity that they held and having access to every leader and member within each church. In one of the churches I was even asked to join the 'Secretariat' unit for the duration of my fieldwork and had access to church files, finances and meetings. While I would never become a true

insider, having the identity of a young white non-Pentecostal American woman, I was able to conduct fieldwork freely and undoubtedly gained invaluable data. I was acutely aware of the benefits and the drawbacks that my identity entailed, and the questions I asked in addition to my subsequent analyses of the data took my identity into consideration. Whenever I had extra time, I attended services of other Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal churches and spoke with their members. In addition to participant observation, much research was conducted through phone interviews, reading church publications and national newspapers and listening to the radio.

During the first phase of fieldwork from 2007 to 2008, I went to 20 crusade meetings, 33 revivals, 23 pastor conferences, 16 bible studies, 13 prayer/deliverance meetings, 47 Sunday services, 19 mid-week services, 20 Sunday schools, 16 women's group meetings, 3 membership classes, 14 street preaching gatherings, 6 workshops put on by faith-based groups, 5 days of personal deliverance rituals, one funeral, one wedding, one day of city wide evangelism, one pastor ordination, and listened to 37 taped sermons in churches that I visited at least once. All these events encompassed 27 different churches: mainline, Pentecostal, charismatic, non-mainline evangelical, and 'spiritist' AICs. I and a research assistant conducted over 600 short interviews with residents of Monrovia, and I conducted 32 long interviews with leaders and members of Pentecostal and mainline churches and organizations. In the second and third phases of research, most of my time was spent re-interviewing key informants and conducting informal interviews with Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal Liberians regarding more specific issues surrounding transitional justice.

Because most of my research involved conversing with and interviewing countless members of selected churches, often informally, and attending dozens of different

church events, for manageability most quotations from interviews and services will not be cited in full. Where no names and dates are given, the quotations should be understood to be from an ordinary representative member. When it is significant, the name of the interviewee and the church he or she belongs to will be given. Many services and interviews were also conducted in Liberian English or in both Standard and Liberian English. All quotations in Liberian English have been translated into Standard English.

Chapter one will go through the literature that deals with the growth of Pentecostalism, the social and political role(s) of Pentecostalism, a general background of religion in Africa, and Pentecostalism in Africa specifically.

Chapter two will introduce the research methodology and outline the churches used as case-studies, providing a brief history, institutional links, demography, activities and services, and major distinguishing emphases of their messages and goals.

Chapter three will examine the post-colonial African state in general, and then provide a brief socio-political and religious background of Liberia. This discussion will highlight some of the major socio-political issues that Liberia is faced with, especially those related to peacebuilding and transitional justice mechanisms.

In chapter four I will describe Pentecostalism in Liberia to show how it primarily deals with problems – personal and public – that people commonly have in their lives, and provides encouragement and methods to solve these problems. The simplified prescription for success is to become born again, live a born again lifestyle, appease the good (God) and fight the bad (Satan). This pervasive and continual emphasis on the need to look toward the spirit world to find these solutions, not found in the

dwindling mainline denominations, suggests that the most general role it plays is that it helps people in Liberia to make sense of and feel they are actively addressing the problems they face. This fundamental role is no different than the role of African religion generally. It is the same religious worldview – ‘primal religiosity’, just articulated using additional spiritual idioms, and acted upon using adapted spiritual techniques.

Chapter five will explain that Pentecostalism maintains its popularity in Liberia because these spiritual idioms are adaptable and flexible so that they are always practical. It will be clear that there is a massive difference between the Pentecostal ideals of what a born-again Christian can expect, and the reality of life in Liberia. The flexible, adaptable and sometimes contradictory spiritual idioms allow people to continuously explain and act upon transgressions, failures and confusion.

Chapter six will provide a case study of the way Pentecostals deal with issues surround peacebuilding and transitional justice, in order to detail the adaptability and flexibility of these Pentecostal spirit idioms. We will see how it is practical in post-conflict Liberia to ‘forgive and forget’ atrocities committed during the war and to move forward; Pentecostalism provides a flexible and adaptable discourse to legitimise these difficult moral decisions.

Chapter seven will discuss one of the unintended consequences of Pentecostal churches: that they achieve the peacebuilding goals that their secular counterparts are unable to achieve. This unintended consequence of Pentecostalism will be compared to strategies used by the TRC in trying to help people understand and act which are evidently less effective at achieving their goals.

To conclude, we will revisit the debates presented in this literature review. At this point it will be clear that Pentecostalism in Liberia is not fulfilling the same socio-political roles as other scholars have argued that Pentecostalism fills in other contexts. Considering the unintended consequences of Pentecostalism, though, is an insightful way to examine the potential socio-political role. Based on these insights, I will provide recommendations for further research in the fields of the study of religions and in African studies, most critically that one must deeply understand the spiritual worldviews of the society that is being studied.

## ***CHAPTER ONE***

### ***Literature Review***

#### ***1.1 Introduction***

This thesis is concerned primarily with the socio-political role of Pentecostalism in Africa, a subject that has gained attention from scholars in a variety of disciplines. This thesis will carefully examine the massive growth of Pentecostal churches within the unique post-conflict setting of nearly total social, economic, educational and political collapse in Liberia. A number of arguments have been made to elucidate the socio-political role of Pentecostalism in different contexts. This thesis will evaluate to what extent the Liberian churches play any of these roles, and what additional roles it might play. It will also ask what it is about the general socio-political climate and the way religion is practised in Liberia that determines what the role(s) of Pentecostalism might be.

It will be argued that the most important aspect to consider in evaluating these roles is that Liberian Pentecostals think about, articulate and act upon all types of this-worldly problems that Liberians are faced with – individual, familial, social and national – in spiritual terms. Amidst the huge variation in churches the common underlying emphasis is that the devil must be defeated and the Holy Spirit embraced in order for problems to be overcome and progress to be made. This attention to spiritually-based solutions for solving this-worldly problems, situated within a clearly dualistic framework provides Liberians with a language in which they can make sense of and talk about these problems, in addition to providing spiritual activities which enable them to feel that they are active in addressing these problems.

The title of the thesis is appropriately ‘Destroying the Destroyer of Your Destiny’, a phrase that was the theme of one crusade put on by CEPC/CHRISEM, one of the case study churches. This phrase was put onto t-shirts, signs and handkerchiefs; it was often accompanied by an image of the devil lying on the ground in flames; standing on top of the devil was an angel, emanating light. This phrase and image perfectly captures the major components of Liberian Pentecostal beliefs: believers can use the power of the Holy Spirit to destroy Satan – the destroyer – who does not want any Christian to have the good fortune – destiny – that he or she is entitled to, as promised by God.

While these problems are rarely effectively solved; Pentecostals maintain their beliefs and find new explanations and methods of solving their enduring problems. This is possible with the Pentecostal worldview because the dualistic spiritual framework is complex and adaptable, and serves to articulate, legitimise and consolidate any ideas, actions, and events occurring in the physical world. These spiritual idioms used are never constant and even sometimes contradict one another, but they are always practical. Acknowledging this, I ask: what are some of the implications of these flexible spiritual idioms when they are used to address or act upon this-worldly events?

To address this question this thesis will focus on socio-political role of Pentecostalism with respect to transitional justice, specifically the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The thesis will present empirical evidence that Pentecostals applying these idioms have as an unintended consequence achieved many of the peacebuilding goals of the TRC, while the TRC has been relatively ineffective at achieving these goals. Based on this evidence, one can argue that the

Pentecostal spiritual worldview is evidently good for peacebuilding and certainly better than the TRC at peacebuilding. However, because Pentecostal opinions and actions regarding the TRC are based upon their practicality in the physical world and articulated using flexible spiritual idioms, not based upon a concrete doctrine or static worldview, one cannot assume that these consequences will be the same in all circumstances.

### ***1.2 Why religion matters***

In most literature dealing with socio-political issues, the role of religion is sidelined. This is not surprising, considering the influential secularisation thesis that expected modernisation to lead to a decreasing utility and popularity of religion in public life.<sup>1</sup> Recently it has become necessary to reconsider the assumptions of the secularisation thesis, given the remarkable growth and public role of Pentecostalism throughout the world, especially Africa. While post-colonial African states adopted Western-style politics, including the rational-legal idea of separation between church and state, there is enduring religiosity<sup>2</sup> and a consistent interpenetration of religion, politics and public life generally. Many scholars even refer to a recent resurgence of religion in public life, and increasing discourse surrounding witchcraft, sorcery and other ‘enchanted’ worldviews.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For comprehensive considerations of secularisation, see Steve Bruce, *God Is Dead: Secularization in the West*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2002; David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory*, England: Ashgate, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar, ‘The Role of Religion in Development: Towards a New Relationship between the European Union and Africa’, *European Journal of Development Research*, 18:3, 2006, 351-2. For a discussion of these movements and politics before the 1990s, see Terence Ranger, ‘Religious Movements and Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa’, *African Studies Review*, 29:2, 1986, 1-69.

<sup>3</sup> See especially Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar, ‘Religion and politics in sub-Saharan Africa’, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 36, 2, 1998.

Observers of African affairs have dealt with the endurance and strength of religion in many ways. While much of the literature still ignores the importance of enduring religiosity in Africa altogether, some of it gives a brief comment, usually only to explain the phenomenon as indicative of the continent being ‘stuck in the past’ because of failed attempts at Western-style progress and modernisation.<sup>4</sup> More serious analyses of religion make deeper points based on the acknowledgement that, as Ellis and ter Haar have articulated well, whether one perceives such beliefs to be true or untrue, ‘religion, in whatever form it takes, constitutes a social and political reality’,<sup>5</sup> which cannot be simply dismissed as false consciousness or backwardness. Such scholars will point out that modernisation does not necessarily lead to ‘Westernisation’, and societies might modernise in a number of different ways that are different from, not ‘lagging behind’ Western models of social progress; the use of religion is one reflection of this different path.<sup>6</sup>

Chabal and Daloz elaborate on this concept by arguing that belief in the ‘irrational’ makes a certain sense and has a critical social purpose in African

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<sup>4</sup> Pels has described such analyses as unhelpfully ‘reproduc[ing] the imperial stereotype of a dark core posing a threat to the public and civilized world, something against which one needs to protect oneself to safeguard civility and reason’. Peter Pels, ‘The Magic of Africa: Reflections on a Western Commonplace’, *African Studies Review*, 41:3, 1998, 206. A good example of this type of scholarship can be seen in Kaplan’s ‘The Coming Anarchy’ which has been heavily criticised by most serious observers of African religion, especially Ellis, for its descriptions of African cultures as innately ‘barbaric’. Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy, the destruction of Liberia and the religious dimension of an African Civil War*, London: Hurst, 1999, 17-30. See also Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rainforest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone*, Oxford: James Curry, 1998; Mary Moran, *The Violence of Democracy*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Ellis and ter Haar, ‘The Role’, 353.

<sup>6</sup> See especially Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Modernity and its Malcontents: ritual and power in postcolonial Africa*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993; Henrietta Moore and Todd Sanders, *Magical Interpretations, Material Realities: Modernity, Witchcraft and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*, London: Routledge, 2001; Adam Ashforth, ‘Reflections on Spiritual Insecurity in a Modern African City (Soweto)’, *African Studies Review*, 41:3, 1998, 39-67; Peter Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*, Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1997; Dirk Kohnert, ‘Magic and witchcraft: Implications for democratization and poverty-alleviating aid in Africa’, *World Development*, 24:8, 1996, 1347-1355.

contexts.<sup>7</sup> Acknowledging its social import, some scholars identify a particular ‘rationality’ to the practice and form of religion in Africa and will seek to ‘explain and translate’ the religious idioms used with reference to this-worldly changes.<sup>8</sup> This might have particular relevance in weak states, as Ellis writes: ‘It is not surprising that where the state can no longer convince people of its ability to deliver a prosperous new life through development, other mechanisms of social regulation may be invented or rediscovered.’<sup>9</sup>

Despite these major differences in interpretation and method, many scholars are realising that religion in Africa is something that should not be ignored, and must be more carefully analysed before any conclusions are made concerning its social and political role.<sup>10</sup> Increasingly, scholars are acknowledging that religious ideas and worldviews, however subtle, are still ‘an essential part of politics in Africa at every level’.<sup>11</sup> Ellis and ter Haar have devoted an entire book to this idea, explaining how political meanings are expressed in spirit idioms.<sup>12</sup> They further argue that religion

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<sup>7</sup> Chabal and Daloz write of the ‘re-traditionalization’ of Africa that combines modernity with ‘the irrational’ and that witchcraft is ‘one of the few means of “indigenous” social responsibility available, however crude its practice may be in reality’. Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, Jean-Pascal, *Africa Works: Disorder As Political Instrument*, Oxford: James Currey, 1999, 63, 76.

<sup>8</sup> See especially Ellis and ter Haar: ‘Religion is a symbolic language, whose evolution may be compared to that of other languages. Like them, it reflects and communicates people’s ideas about the world they live in. all languages change over time. Individual items of vocabulary disappear and new ones appear, invented on the spot or borrowed from abroad. Languages, however, also have a grammar, a structure that changes only slowly. Religion, too, has a vocabulary and a grammar, both of which change over time and at different speeds’. Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar, ‘Religion and Politics: Taking African Epistemologies Seriously’, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 45, 2007, 388.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Ellis, ‘Young Soldiers and the Significance of Initiation: Some notes on Liberia’, Conference paper presented in Leiden, 2003, available at: <http://www.ascleiden.nl/Pdf/conference24042003-ellis.pdf>, 8.

<sup>10</sup> Pels recommends a ‘genealogy of Western perceptions of the magic of Africa’, given such wide variety in interpretation. Pels, ‘The magic’, 194.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar. *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, 18.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 111.

must be treated as any other social factor,<sup>13</sup> and not within its own analytical category<sup>14</sup>. Even some development organisations and governments are beginning to focus on the subject in terms of its role in ‘human development’, marking a shift away from their usual focus on only the economic aspects.<sup>15</sup> In order to better understand the importance of religion in Africa, the various forms, adaptations and potential implications of African religion need to be considered,<sup>16</sup> especially Pentecostalism.

### ***1.3 Pentecostalism in Africa – Background***

The growth of Pentecostalism throughout the world has been given a significant amount of scholarly attention in recent years.<sup>17</sup> Certainly it deserves all this attention, given its numerical growth and expansion to nearly every part of the world, especially throughout Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>18</sup> One thing that is apparent in much of the

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<sup>13</sup> ‘Religion must be apprehended as a social and analytical category, the constitution of which, by the analyst as much as the society in question, requires sociological explanation’. Maia Green citing Asad, 2003, in ‘Confronting categorical assumptions about the power of religion in Africa’, *Review of African Political Economy*, 33:110, 2006, 636.

<sup>14</sup> ‘The ‘religious’ must be grasped as a category of analysis and practice which has origins in the political struggles around delimiting the power of certain institutions’. Ibid, 637.

<sup>15</sup> For example, the UK government’s wing of development, the Department for International Development (DFID) has begun a project called Faiths in Development; the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a Knowledge Forum on Religion and Development Policy. The World Bank and IMF have shown interest in the subject. Ellis and ter Haar, ‘The role of religion’, 352-3.

<sup>16</sup> ‘A major obstacle to investigating the role of religion in development is a widespread misunderstanding about what religion actually is’. Ibid., 353

<sup>17</sup> For recent scholarship describing global Pentecostalism, see Allan Anderson & Walter Hollenweger (eds.), *Pentecostals After A Century: Global Perspectives on a Movement in Transition*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999; Anderson, Allan, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004; David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002. Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Development Worldwide*, 1997.

<sup>18</sup> It has been estimated that there are as many as 500 million Pentecostals in the world. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, 1. They make up 25% of all Christians, compared to only 6% in 1970. Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: the Coming of Global Christianity*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, 2-4. It has also been estimated that in 2000, 11% of the population of Africa (including North Africa) was charismatic or Pentecostal. PJSG Johnstone and J. Mandryk, *Operation World*, Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001, 21.

scholarship is that one must appreciate the huge variety among Pentecostal churches. Most of the scholarship agrees that there are two fundamental elements that are common to all these churches: the central emphasis on this-worldly manifestations of the Holy Spirit, and the experiential nature of worship.<sup>19</sup> Aside from these characteristics, it is difficult to make generalisations about why Pentecostalism is gaining popularity and what its socio-political role is. Much of the scholarship examines the institutional, organisational and doctrinal aspects of Pentecostalism to explain why it has taken root in so many places around the world.<sup>20</sup> Fewer scholars examine in-depth the spiritual worldview of Pentecostals; this thesis will consider those scholars who do focus on this latter aspect, among whom there still is a vibrant debate. Before outlining these debates, it is important to provide an overview of the features most commonly presented by scholars who are examining Pentecostalism, especially in Africa, and which will be frequently alluded to throughout this thesis.

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<sup>19</sup> There are also a number of terms that scholars have used to describe this type of Christianity, all of which have their own specific nuances and etiologies. For the purposes of this thesis, however, ‘Pentecostal’ and ‘charismatic’ will be used interchangeably.

<sup>20</sup> For American influence, see Brouwer, Steve, Gifford, Paul and Rose, Susan, *Exporting the American Gospel: Global Christian Fundamentalism*, New York: Routledge, 1996; David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990. For community, see David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Pentecostalism in Latin America*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1990. For opting into the global sphere, see André Corten and Ruth Marshall-Fratani (eds.), *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America*, London: Hurst and Company, 2001; Simon Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; Karla Poewe (ed.), *Charismatic Christianity as a Global Culture*, Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1994; Harri Englund, ‘Christian Independence and Global Membership: Pentecostal Extraversions in Malawi’, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 33:1, 2003, 83-111. For issues relating to the reach of Pentecostal media, see J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, ‘Of Faith and Visual Alertness: The Message of ‘Mediatized’ Religion in an African Pentecostal Context’, *Material Religion*, 1:3, 2005, 336-357; Rosalind I.J. Hackett, ‘Charismatic/Pentecostal Appropriation of Media Technologies in Nigeria and Ghana’, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 28:3, 1998, 258-277; Ruth Marshall-Fratani, ‘Mediating the Global and Local in Nigerian Pentecostalism’, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 28:3, 1998, 278-315. For experience and African styles of worship, see Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, London: Cassell, 1996; James L. Cox and Gerrie ter Haar, *Uniquely African? African Christian Identity from Cultural and Historical Perspectives*, New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc., 2003.

### *1.3.1 Personal transformation and conversion*

One common characteristic of Pentecostal churches is their emphasis on personal change that will necessarily come when a person gives his or her life to Christ, that is, when he or she becomes ‘born again’. A true born-again Christian is generally believed to be willingly possessed by the Holy Spirit due to this acceptance of ‘Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and saviour’; this divine influence will change the way he or she thinks and acts. Members of Pentecostal churches often testify to the ways that they have changed upon conversion, recalling their previously sinful life where the devil was in control, and then describing how becoming born-again took them away from such sinful behaviour and made them a better person thanks to the divine influence from God. A born-again believer who is not totally transformed is believed to still have some negative influences or to have not totally embraced the Holy Spirit. For such believers, more work needs to be done so that they attain this Pentecostal ideal.

### *1.3.2 Problem-solving and success*

The Pentecostal focus on problem-solving using spiritual means is well-represented in the literature and thus may be considered another pervasive trait of Pentecostalism in Africa. In many cases, however, mere problem-solving is not enough; instead, a true believer *must* be profoundly successful in all facets of his or her life. Gifford has considered this focus to be a fundamental trait to these new types of Pentecostal churches in Africa.<sup>21</sup> There are two major methods that Pentecostals

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<sup>21</sup> See especially Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.

use in order to try to solve their problems and become successful: following the prosperity gospel, and engaging in spiritual warfare.

#### 1.3.2.1 Prosperity gospel

The prosperity gospel is also known as seed faith, the gospel of health and wealth, the faith gospel and ‘the law of sowing and reaping’. Gifford has explored the roots of the faith gospel and shown its evolution from 20<sup>th</sup> century American pastor Kenneth Hagin and his successors and graduates of his Bible school, many of whom have travelled around the world imparting this message, which has undoubtedly taken root in Africa. The general idea of the faith gospel is that God intends the ‘saved’ to be rich, happy and healthy; if they are not, then there is a problem with their faith. More faith means more success; a believer demonstrates his or her faith by giving, particularly to the church. There are two major types of giving: tithes, which are mandatory, and offerings or seeds, which are voluntary. The incentive for giving offerings is that the more you give, the more you will get back in the future. Followers of this theology believe that whatever a faithful believer gives to the church or pastor now has been ‘planted in fertile soil’ and will thus begin to ‘grow’, enabling the believer to ‘reap’ a far greater amount sometime in the future. This theology had a period of profound success through the 1980s in Africa but, as Gifford points out, there came a point where it clearly wasn’t working for those who subscribed to it. In response, deliverance theology began to increase in popularity through the 1990s as it attempted to explain why even the most faithful and generous believers were not yet reaping their rewards; many were suffering even more than they had in the decade prior.

### 1.3.2.2 Spiritual warfare

Most scholars of Pentecostalism agree that another common feature to all such churches is their attention to the pervasive spirits that are fighting on either side of two eternally opposed forces: Satan and God. Every aspect of life is considered to be a physical reflection of the ongoing spiritual warfare between these two forces. Satan utilises all kinds of evil spirits to cause harm in the physical world, especially by possessing people and causing them problems. The only effective way to combat these negative forces is through the all-powerful and omni-benevolent Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the ultimate winner in this war, but before this victory can be manifest on earth, people must utilise the powers of the Holy Spirit to defeat Satan's earthly agents. Only then can positive effects be experienced.

These ideas are expressed most clearly in ritual(s) of deliverance: the act in which an individual taps into the power of the Holy Spirit to cast out evil spirits and break curses that are perceived to be causing all sorts of problems in his or her life.<sup>22</sup> Since the 1990s, especially in West Africa, churches that offer or even specialise in conducting deliverance have become extremely popular. The growing scholarship that examines this component of Pentecostalism reveals that there is a wide variety in the performance and discourse surrounding deliverance in different contexts.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role*, London: Hurst & Company, 1998, 97, 338-339. See also Abamfo Atiemo, 'Deliverance in the Charismatic Churches in Ghana', *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology*, 4:2, 1994-5, 39-49; Hansjorg Dilger, 'Healing the Wounds of Modernity: Salvation, Community and Care in a Neo-Pentecostal Church in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 37, 2007, 59-83; Gerrie ter Haar, *Spirit of Africa: the healing ministry of Archbishop Milingo of Zambia*, Trenton: Africa World Press, 1992.

<sup>23</sup> There are also significant variations to the prerequisites and methods for deliverance within the published literature available throughout West Africa. Gwendolyn Heaner, 'Charismatic Deliverance: A comparison between Derek Prince and Eleven West Africa Authors', Unpublished MA Dissertation, SOAS, 2006.

In many cases, it is required that an individual first become ‘born again’ or ‘saved’ for deliverance to be effective and lasting. Even after conversion and deliverance, there are still a number of ways a person can be attacked by Satan. In some churches, involving oneself, even passively, with anything considered evil will create an ‘entry point’ for evil spirits to gain access and subsequently cause problems. There is also great variation as to what Pentecostals classify as evil but certainly, most agree that all other religions and spiritual practices such as visiting traditional African healers will invite Satanic influence.<sup>24</sup> This designation of evil can sometimes apply to passive participation in traditional ceremonies or African Independent Churches (AICs)<sup>25</sup>; even the possession of traditional or ‘un-Christian’ objects might allow evil spirits cause harm.<sup>26</sup> While such Pentecostals would probably consider visiting a traditional healer to be more spiritually dangerous than possessing a Bible, such examples indicate the extreme flexibility between Pentecostal churches in designating certain activities and beliefs as good or evil. There are also many variations between these churches in ways they consider evil spirits to act.

In some churches, for example, evil spirits are also able to gain entrance to an individual because of generational ties. For example, Maxwell’s ethnography of the

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<sup>24</sup> Anderson, in a survey of 140 Pentecostals, found that nearly all did not deal with traditional African religion. Allan Anderson, ‘Exorcism and Conversion to African Pentecostalism’, *Exchange*, 35:1, 2006, 127.

<sup>25</sup> African Independent Churches (AICs) had a period of great popularity in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, but have been diminishing in numbers since the 1970s. For more on AICs, see Allan Anderson, *African Reformation*, Eritrea: Africa World Press, Inc., 2001; David Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa*, Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968; Bengt Sundkler (1948), *Bantu Prophets of South Africa*, London: Oxford University Press, 1964.

<sup>26</sup> In one extreme case, Engelke provides evidence of independent Masowe apostolic churches in Zimbabwe actively shunning use of the Bible because they see it as both a colonial imposition and that it can ‘deaden’ faith, when all a believer needs is the true experience of the Holy Spirit as a guide for living and avoiding demonic influence. ‘The Bible’s “rejection,” then, is based in part on a pragmatic approach to colonial and mission history, but even more so on the object’s religious inadequacies. Performance – in particular listening to God speaks through prophets – becomes the medium through which these inadequacies can be overcome’. Matthew Engelke, ‘Text and performance in an African church: The Book, “live and direct”’, 31:1, 2004, 79.

Zimbabwe Assemblies of God, Africa (ZAOGA) describes the ‘Spirit of Poverty’, which is a pervasive demonic spirit that is passed from generation to generation, causing consistent economic struggle even if a person is born-again and lives a ‘good’ Christian life. To fight these generational spirits, one must actively separate from apparent and even subtle aspects of tradition.<sup>27</sup> However, in many churches, it is believed that even when all traditional and generational ties are renounced, other evil spirits might still enter if a believer has any association with things considered to be evil in nature; for example drinking alcohol, wearing revealing clothing, having premarital sex, and looking at pornography.<sup>28</sup> All of these acts are considered to be deeply immoral and evolved from the demonic realm; to fight them, the power of the Holy Spirit must be used.

Having briefly outlined the major features of Pentecostalism that are described in much of the scholarship, three of the major debates that consider the socio-political role of religion in Africa, particularly Pentecostalism, will be outlined below.

#### ***1.4 Explicit political and social engagement***

##### ***1.4.1 The church as civil society***

Most analyses of the implications of religion deal specifically with religious institutions and leaders who engage in formal, explicit and active involvement with political and social issues and engage with political and social institutions; that is,

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<sup>27</sup> Such discourse has been elevated to the national level, in what is called ‘Third World Mentality’ by ZAOGA. The leader, Guti, has claimed, ‘Go to any nation where they worship idols or cows, these countries have problems and are poor’. David Maxwell, ‘Delivered from the Spirit of Poverty?: Pentecostalism, Prosperity and Modernity in Zimbabwe’, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 28:3, 1998, 359.

<sup>28</sup> Again, the activities that are believed to let in demons can vary from church to church. For an in-depth discussion of the variety of spirits and methods of deliverance in West African literature, see Heaner, ‘Charismatic Deliverance’.

religious groups are evaluated in terms of how they perform as agents of civil society.<sup>29</sup> It is argued that these groups have a unique legitimacy in public life, and therefore their opinions, ideas and demands cannot be easily ignored by the state and its leaders. This, it is argued, can encourage formal political or social change because the powerful institutions respond.<sup>30</sup> Involvement on this level includes direct engagement with politicians and mobilisation of churches with reference to political and/or social issues such as protest, endorsement of certain political candidates, issuance of pastoral letters,<sup>31</sup> vocal criticism of the state and pressures for more government accountability and transparency and calls for social justice. There is ample evidence of African churches, almost always the mainline denominations, being involved in political and social issues in this way throughout the 1990s ‘third wave’ of democratisation.<sup>32</sup> In addition to formal engagement with social and political issues, mainline churches have also been considered to have a unique role in

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<sup>29</sup> Ellis and ter Haar, ‘The role’, 356, 358.

<sup>30</sup> Haynes identifies three determining measures by which Pentecostalism might affect politics: the number of adherents in society, the degree to which churches seek to dictate how society should behave, and the extent to which churches attempt to involve themselves directly in the political process. Jeff Haynes, *Religion and Politics in Africa*, London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1996, 206.

<sup>31</sup> However, Gifford has suggested that in Kenya they are losing much of their original social and political import ‘They remain at a level of considerable generality... In the darkest days of Moi, of course, to state publicly that ‘land clashes’ were in fact politically-instigated ethnic cleansing was significant, because no one else could have said it. But since the advent of multi-party politics, generalities are of a limited value... little changes. General exhortations to avoid corruption and promote justice have come to be seen as rather hollow, almost as evasions... Issuing pastoral letter becomes a ritual that is performed, a game that is played’. Paul Gifford, *Christianity, Politics and Public Life in Kenya*, London: Hurst and Co., 2009, 61.

<sup>32</sup> Gifford, *African Christianity*, 28-31, 68-68; Gifford, *Ghana’s*, 20-23; Ogbu U. Kalu, *Power, Poverty and Prayer: The Challenges of Poverty and Pluralism in African Christianity, 1960-1996*, New Jersey and Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2006, 118-128. See also Kenneth R. Ross, ‘Preaching in Mainstream Christian Churches in Malawi: A Survey and Analysis’, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 25:1, 1995, 3-24; Paul Gifford, ‘Chiluba’s Christian Nation: Christianity as a Factor in Zambian Politics 1991-1996’, *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 13:3, 1998, 363-381; Timothy Longman, ‘Empowering the Weak and Protecting the Powerful: The Contradictory Nature of Churches in Central Africa’, *African Studies Review*, 41:1, 1998, 49-72; Sara Rich Dorman, ““Rocking the Boat?”: Church NGOs and Democratization in Zimbabwe”, *African Affairs*, 101, 2002, 75-92.

peacebuilding initiatives.<sup>33</sup> The church's public role is particularly powerful because the people tend to see it and its leaders as legitimate and well-meaning,<sup>34</sup> especially in societies where the people tend not to trust or rely on the state and other non-religious institutions.<sup>35</sup> Most studies of Pentecostalism admit that the churches do not engage with political or social issues in this way. In many instances, the churches actively preach against such involvement because they believe it distracts from the more-important role that God plays in these issues.

While there is, to this author's knowledge, no scholarship describing explicit political engagement of Pentecostal churches, there are a few studies that highlight the explicit role that some Pentecostal churches are playing in social issues, especially as described in Miller and Yamamori's study of the 'Progressive Pentecostals'.<sup>36</sup> Otherwise, it is generally agreed that if these churches are evaluated in terms of their role as an agent of civil society, we can see how they are relatively unconcerned with explicit political or social engagement. However, there might be other socio-political roles that they play.

#### *1.4.2 Spiritualising Politics*

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<sup>33</sup> Most often, such initiatives take the form of Inter-religious councils that have been credited for helping to end conflicts, as in Liberia.

<sup>34</sup> These groups, Appleby argues, will have their greatest effect when they have 'collaborated effectively with government, non-government and other religious actors... Indeed, "religious peacebuilding" is a misnomer if it leads one to believe that religious actors were able to transform dimensions of modern conflict by functioning independently of government and other secular and religious actors' and 'must be able to speak a second-order language that transcends religious and ethnic boundaries and fosters collaboration with secular and government agencies and representatives. R. Scott Appleby, *The ambivalence of the sacred*, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000, 212.

<sup>35</sup> The ability of a religious group to have a major role in conflict resolution is described by Appleby as dependant on the group's 'historical record and reputation, size, resources, ethnic composition, and public and political presences of the religious body in question'. Quoted in Dubois, ft 85

<sup>36</sup> Donald Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: the new face of Christian social engagement*, Berkley: University of California Press, 2007.

Despite the non-involvement with social and political issues in a formal sense, Pentecostals are undoubtedly concerned with these issues, but on a different level: the spiritual. Most basically, they consider all social and economic ills to be rooted in the spirit world and therefore feel they can be addressed only through Christian belief and practice: only God can help and He can do this directly. A believer is encouraged to pray and adhere to moral codes of conduct in order to solve problems. According to this worldview, problems plaguing the nation can be healed only if enough born-again Christians spiritually combat Satanic forces. For many Pentecostals, deliverance is the answer for any problem, whatever the other available this-worldly solutions might be.

According to some scholars, the spiritualisation of politics has in some cases led to a 'passive acceptance' of destructive regimes. During the 2000 elections in Ghana, for example, Gifford observed how Pentecostal Pastor Duncan-Williams based his vocal support of the NDC on his interpretation of biblical texts that discourages people from criticising the government and its officials, however badly they have been running the country.<sup>37</sup> In Liberia through the 1980s, in another example, Gifford shows how Samuel Doe achieved near-dictatorial status without a single criticism from Pentecostal churches. Indeed, many actively supported his brutal and corrupt regime:

This Christianity was totally political. According to it, the corruption, oppression and mismanagement inflicting such harm at every level of Liberian life were of no concern to a Christian. A "biblical Christian" was to pay no attention to them. This Christianity provided incalculable support to Doe – as it undermined every effort of the opposition. It can be truly said, that after the US government, this

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<sup>37</sup> Gifford, *Ghana's*, 180.

Christianity – so pervasive that it could be called simply “Liberian Christianity” – was the greatest single support for Doe’s regime.<sup>38</sup>

Maxwell describes a similar worldview from prominent ZAOGA preacher Emmanuel Guti in Zimbabwe who said, ‘Every church leader must support the Government and pray for the Government. It is not good for a church leader to take sides in politics’.<sup>39</sup>

Because of their tendency to deal with politics in this way, Pentecostals have developed something of a reputation for being easily manipulated or co-opted by political leaders. In some cases, all a candidate needs to do to ensure votes or enduring support is claim to be ‘born-again’.<sup>40</sup> While not all attempts are successful in winning the Pentecostal vote, the frequency with which it is attempted attests to the reputation Pentecostals have in relation to politics.

In another example of the spiritualisation of socio-political issues, Asamoah-Gyadu describes the 2003 Ghana Airway’s prayer vigil in which world-renowned Pentecostal Lawrence Tetteh came from London to publicly exorcise the company from its demons in order to solve the financial problems the airline faced. Tetteh declared that there were human agents with supernatural powers conspiring against

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<sup>38</sup> Paul Gifford, *Christianity and Politics in Doe’s Liberia*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, 302-303. See also Gifford, “Directed by the Hand of God”: The Role of Liberian Christianity During the Civil War’, in Gifford (ed.) *The Christian Churches and the Democratisation of Africa*, Leiden, New York and Cologne: Brill, 1995, 277-278.

<sup>39</sup> David Maxwell, “Catch the Cockerel Before Dawn”: Pentecostalism and Politics in Post-Colonial Zimbabwe’, *Africa*, 70:2, 2000, 271.

<sup>40</sup> For examples of this in Ghana see. Gifford, *Ghana’s*, 178. For Liberia see David Harris, ‘From “Warlord” to “Democratic” President: How Charles Taylor Won the 1997 Liberian Elections’, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 37:3, 1999, 446 and David Harris, ‘Liberia 2005: An unusual African post-conflict election’, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 44: 2006, 375-395. For Liberia, see also Gifford, “Directed”, 277.

the airline, and that the appropriate response was for workers to unite and fight against this evil through a mass deliverance ceremony.<sup>41</sup>

Many scholars point out that this spiritualisation of politics and social issues can discourage the tangible action that is required for African states and institutions to experience economic and social development, rule of law and good governance.<sup>42</sup> Thus in relation to modern political debate that one might expect of a multiparty democracy, ‘churches contribute little because they spiritualise and moralise issues out of the mundane plane on which political issues have been most fruitfully addressed’.<sup>43</sup>

Ter Haar directly criticises Gifford for being too ‘Western’ in this analysis of Ghanaian Pentecostalism and that he ‘falls short in his lack of insight into some important implications of a religious or spiritual approach to development’ and ‘declines to look at human development as a *process*, rather than in terms of practical results to be achieved in a set period of time’.<sup>44</sup> The key question here is whether effective development can occur only with actions that are immediate and tangible, or whether development can occur as a result of something more long-term and subtle. For Ellis and ter Haar, a spiritual approach to development, while subtle, is indeed a form of meaningful socio-political activity.

That said, it is critical to situate African politics in its global context, which tends not to accept or understand this spiritualisation of political issues. In the paper that

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<sup>41</sup> Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “‘Christ is the Answer’: What is the Question? A Ghana Airways Prayer Vigil and its Implications for Religion, Evil, and Public Space”, *The Journal of Religion in Africa*, 35:1, 2005, 103, 107, 115.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 107, 115.

<sup>43</sup> Gifford, *Ghana’s*, 164-169. See also Gifford, *Kenya*, 229-232.

<sup>44</sup> Gerrie ter Haar, ‘Review: Ghana’s New Christianity’, in *African Affairs*, 105:420, 2006, 486-487.

precedes their book, Ellis and ter Haar acknowledge this global reality to be a key ‘challenge’ for Africans: ‘[they must] develop a new language of politics which incorporates the role of public authorities as upholders of cosmic order while also being comprehensible internationally’, although this is only alluded to in the last paragraph of their paper.<sup>45</sup> In their book, they avoid this ‘challenge’ altogether.

### ***1.5 Doctrines are reforming people and culture***

#### *1.5.1 Personal transformations*

It is assumed in much of the scholarship that the stress on personal transformations within these churches necessarily results in truly transformed church members. Following this idea that within Pentecostal churches, people are changing their lifestyles and ideas, some scholars argue that on a larger scale and over time, these personal transformations can lead to major social and cultural transformations. Such transformations, it is argued, will have major effects on socio-political issues like the inculcation of democratic values and the strengthening of neo-liberal capitalism.

#### *1.5.2 Democracy*

A popular argument is that Pentecostals are unintentionally transforming politics and society by transforming cultural values that will help inculcate democratic virtues and consolidate democratic societies. It is argued that Pentecostals’ focus on mass-conversion and personal transformations are important foundations for political and

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<sup>45</sup> Ellis and ter Haar, ‘Religion and Politics’, 201.

social changes over the long-term.<sup>46</sup> Some scholars find similarities between modern Pentecostalism and Methodism in the United States and Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a religious movement they see as responsible for changing social life and cultural norms through its message of ‘individual freedom, autonomy, responsibility and achievement’.<sup>47</sup> David Martin, the most prominent voice of this side of the debate, argues that Pentecostalism has the potential to do the same thing in many parts of the developing world, because its ‘virtues of betterment, self-discipline, aspiration, and hard work are those which in the Western experience are assigned to the first, harsh phase of modernization’.<sup>48</sup>

It is also argued that Pentecostal churches are voluntary organisations whose members needed to ‘walk out’ from social and cultural norms in order to join.<sup>49</sup> Such activity can be considered a challenge to the existing political and social structures because Pentecostals become autonomous, a necessary aspect of a healthy democracy.<sup>50</sup> Martin bases his arguments on Latin America, which is characterised by centuries of Catholic hegemony and authoritarian regimes, so one can see the profound impact that a ‘walk out’ from these structures might have. The religious and political context in Africa, however, is much different. Still, Marshall has made a similar argument in relation to Pentecostalism in Nigeria, which she describes as

Both a powerful metaphor for new types of practice, for the creation of ‘autonomous spaces’ of practice which defy the oppressive logic of current ‘power monopolies’, for the articulation of strategies to create, exercise and legitimate new power relations and new opportunities for survival, and finally, as a symbolic

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<sup>46</sup> Haynes, *Religion*, 204-205.

<sup>47</sup> Hatch quoted in Martin, *Pentecostalism*, 8.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 11-12. Also, ‘evangelical groups work upon society by the ‘cultural logic’ they imprint and exemplify’. Martin, *Tongues*, 286.

and material resource for the ‘elaboration of a conceptual challenge to the power monopolies.<sup>51</sup>

Another claim made for the democratising potential of Pentecostalism is that it surpasses all ethnic, national and class boundaries and forms a new community built solely on being ‘born-again’.<sup>52</sup> This might have political ramifications in relation to the problems that arise from the African state’s relative lack of coherent nationalisms.<sup>53</sup> The formation of a community based primarily on being born-again might also contribute to women’s equality. Churches might also be empowering women by giving them leadership opportunities, venues in which to speak out and, more subtly, by domesticating men and thereby giving women more power where it really matters: in the home.<sup>54</sup>

### 1.5.3 *Neo-liberal capitalism*

Another vibrant debate concerns the extent to which Pentecostalism might encourage upward mobility by inculcating the ideals of neo-liberal capitalism.<sup>55</sup> Bernice Martin has argued that in Latin America, Pentecostal churches have encouraged upward mobility by inculcating virtues such as saving money, spending wisely, devoting resources to the family, and working hard – ideals that can compare

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<sup>51</sup> Ruth Marshall, ‘Power’, 215.

<sup>52</sup> Marshall, “Power in the Name of Jesus”: Social Transformation and Pentecostalism in Western Nigeria ‘Revisited’, in Ranger, Terence and Vaughan, Olufemi (eds.), *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth-Century Africa*, Oxford: Macmillan, 1993, 220.

<sup>53</sup> Kalu cited in Paul Freiston, *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 111.

<sup>54</sup> See especially Elizabeth Brusco, *The Reformation of Machismo: Evangelical Conversion and Gender in Colombia*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995. See also Bernice Martin, who writes, ‘In an entirely literal sense, Pentecostal men have been ‘domesticated’, returned to the home. In ‘The Pentecostal Gender Paradox: A Cautionary Tale for the Sociology of Religion’, in R.K Fenn (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, Malden, Blackwell, 2007, 53-55. See also D Martin, *Pentecostalism*, 169.

<sup>55</sup> See especially Lawrence Schlemmer, *Dormant Capital: Pentecostalism in South Africa*, Johannesburg, CDE, 2008.

with Weber's famous analysis of how the Protestant work ethic, particularly strong in Calvinistic belief, laid the cultural foundations for capitalism in Northern Europe.<sup>56</sup>

One major criticism of this argument comes from Meyer, who points out that the idea that Pentecostalism leads to a Protestant work ethic is fundamentally flawed because Pentecostalism is totally enmeshed with neo-liberal capitalism and 'the world', while Weber's model deals with a social movement that was opposed to existing norms.<sup>57</sup> She does not deny the possibility that this could happen, but calls for a more careful analysis than the broad generalisations that scholars of Pentecostalism have tended towards.<sup>58</sup>

The preceding arguments that Pentecostalism can change culture make a few assumptions. The first assumption is that because Pentecostalism preaches about the importance of personal transformation towards ideas that are more democratic and capitalistic, then these believers will necessarily *be* transformed in these ways. Scholars have shown how there are many cases in which this is not the case; in response, the churches find themselves frequently needing to address the problem of personal transgressions. The second assumption is that conversion requires an individual to 'walk out' from social and cultural norms. It must be acknowledged that Latin America is a very different environment from Africa, where scholars have shown that joining a Pentecostal church is not always a major rupture with the status quo.

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<sup>56</sup> Bernice Martin, 'New Mutations of the Protestant Ethic among Latin American Pentecostals', *Religion*, 25, 1995, 101-117.

<sup>57</sup> 'Pentecostalism appears to be entangled with the culture of neo-liberalism to such an extent, that it is impossible to still conceptually confine religion to a separate sphere, and investigate the relation between religion and economy in instrumental terms'. Birgit Meyer, 'Pentecostalism and neo-liberal capitalism: Unpublished paper, 2007, 11-12.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

The third assumption is that cultural movements such as Pentecostalism have the power to change social and political structures. Even Martin acknowledges the limitations of this argument. Critically, he asks: ‘How are new potentials in the form of models and images and concepts of the person and of organization stored in the religious capsule, and (maybe) later released into the mainstream of society?’<sup>59</sup> He suggests that inadvertently perhaps, they

send out signals about what may be possible, and the wider society in time picks these up. The most powerful signals ever sent out were those... which indicated how social worlds could be constructed not only on ties of blood and natural contiguity but on spiritual affinities voluntarily embraced.<sup>60</sup>

However, Gifford insists that social change must be kept in perspective and that Africa ‘demands something structural and something immediate’.<sup>61</sup> He acknowledges the potential for long term, informal changes, but ‘My study of the religious situation in Ghana has not convinced me that much of Ghana’s new Christianity leads naturally to many of the benefits sometimes suggested.’<sup>62</sup>

### ***1.6 Pentecostal spiritual idioms: making sense of and actively addressing this-worldly events***

The third major debate concerning the socio-political role of Pentecostalism examines the spiritual idioms that are used within these churches, and what the implicit role of these idioms might be. Before describing the specific Pentecostal idioms, it is important to briefly describe the role(s) and adaptations of religion in Africa.

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<sup>59</sup> Martin, *Tongues*, 286.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 287-288.

<sup>61</sup> Gifford, *African Christianity*, 348.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 196.

### *1.6.1 Providing people with routes towards clarity and order*

Despite the extremely varied nature of the specifics of religious practice throughout sub-Saharan Africa, one common observation about the relationship between the physical and spirit worlds is articulated well by Asamoah-Gyadu: ‘The African universe still remains a sacramental one that does not sharply dichotomise between the physical and spiritual worlds of existence’.<sup>63</sup> Ellis and ter Haar have written widely concerning the reality that in Africa, individuals and communities, publicly and privately, frequently turn to explanations and actions involving invisible forces when dealing with matters pertaining to the physical world.<sup>64</sup> Haram and Yamba have described religion as ‘both the ontological basis for their [African’s] lives and the meaning of life, as well as that which provides prescriptive guidance for how to live in the world’.<sup>65</sup>

In this worldview, all power is considered to have its ultimate source in the spirit world. In order to acquire and thus utilise this power on earth, an individual or community must do something for the spirit that can impart this power. Such logic governs all events that happen in the physical world. Robin Horton very helpfully described religion in pre-colonial Africa as ‘a system of theory and practice guided by the aims of explanation, prediction and control of space-time events’.<sup>66</sup> Over time, though, specific perceptions about the nature of the spirit world have changed. Historically, for example, the spirit world was not considered to be inherently good or

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<sup>63</sup> Asamoah-Gyadu, “‘Christ is the Answer’”, 95.

<sup>64</sup> Ellis and ter Haar, *Worlds*, 6, 85.

<sup>65</sup> Liv Haram and Bawa Yamba, (eds.), *Dealing with Uncertainty in Contemporary African Lives*, Uppsala: Nordika Afrikainstitutet, 2009, 24.

<sup>66</sup> Robin Horton, *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West: Essays on Magic, Religion and Science*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 4.

evil, but positive events were expected when spirits were appeased, causing the individual or community to experience the ‘good life’, including wealth, status and fertility. However, such spirits also had the potential to cause harm in order to, for example, attract attention if they were not appeased.<sup>67</sup> Spiritual leaders communicated with the spirit world and its gods, and the actions the gods required formed the foundations of social order. Therefore, it was an essential endeavour to persistently pay attention to the spirit world when trying to understand and make changes in the physical world.<sup>68</sup>. Horton divided Africa’s ‘basic’ cosmology into two tiers: ‘The lesser spirits underpin events and processes in the microcosm of the local community and its environment, whilst the supreme being underpins events and processes in the macrocosm – i.e. in the world as a whole.’<sup>69</sup> It is this type of religiosity – that which one can find as a common element to all religions – to which I refer throughout this thesis as ‘primal’ religiosity. Other terms that are used to describe the same idea are ‘traditional’ or ‘indigenous’. It requires no written text or set liturgies; its purpose is to ‘explain, predict and control’ this-worldly events; it is the most ‘basic’ cosmology held by people. This is not to say that primal religiosity is necessarily ‘behind’ or ‘less advanced’ than religions that do utilise texts, liturgies and formal institutions. This thesis agrees with the scholars who argue that this ‘traditional’ or ‘primal’ worldview is a critical aspect of African worldviews

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<sup>67</sup> Ellis and ter Haar, ‘Religion and Politics’, 177. See also Ellis and ter Haar, *Worlds*, 54.

<sup>68</sup> For more on traditional African religious systems, see J.D.Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000; Misty L. Bastian, “‘The Daughter She Will Eat Agoisie in the World of the Spirits”. Witchcraft Confessions in Missionised Oritsha, Nigeria”, *Africa*, 72:1, 2002, 83-102; Sandra E. Greene, ‘Religion, History and the Supreme Gods of Africa: A Contribution to the Debate’, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 26:2, 1996, 122-138; Isak A. Niehaus, ‘Witch-Hunting and Political Legitimacy: Continuity and Change in Green Valley, Lebowa, 1930-91’, *Africa*, 63:4, 1993, 498-530.

<sup>69</sup> Robin Horton, ‘On the Rationality of Conversion, Part I’, *Africa*, 45:3, 1975, 219-219.

generally, though over time they have been changed in various ways by external influences.

It is thus important to identify the changes that primal African belief systems have undergone, especially under the influences of colonisation, modernisation, globalisation, Christianity and Islam, to help understand their adaptable utility in society. The African religious worldview is very open to adaptations based on physical realities and the spiritual plane is one that is constantly being addressed in order to make sense of and act upon modern events.<sup>70</sup> Following Horton, it is helpful to analyse the new methods of ‘explanation, prediction and control’ that are used to deal with new situations.

A popular idiom through which ideas concerning the spirit world are expressed is ‘witchcraft’. This term carries Western-inspired nuances that witchcraft is purely evil in nature, but historically any act or accusation of ‘witchcraft’ was situated within a much more complex and ambivalent religious framework. In both historical and modern Africa, dealing with the spirit world in order to gain power has been consistently acceptable, but the specific ways in which this has been done and the subsequent way the power is used has always been under scrutiny from society.<sup>71</sup> Many scholars have noted an increase in popular perceptions that the spirit world is imbalanced on the side of evil.<sup>72</sup> Witchcraft has become something in essence

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 85-108.

<sup>71</sup> Cyprian Fisiy and Peter Geschiere, ‘Witchcraft, violence and identity: different trajectories in postcolonial Cameroon’, in Werbner, R. and T. Ranger (eds.), *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*, London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1996, 194.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 812. Ellis and ter Haar, ‘Religion’, 177. Birgit Meyer, *Translating the Devil: religion and modernity among the Ewe in Ghana*. International African Library 21, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, for the International African Institute, 1999, 177; Ellis and ter Haar, *Worlds*, 93-94. Geschiere, *Modernity*, 6-7, 21; Misty L. Bastian, “‘Bloodhounds who have no friends’: witchcraft and locality in the Nigerian popular press” in Comaroff and Comaroff, *Modernity*, 129-166; see also Ashforth, ‘Reflections’, 62.

malevolent; traditional spirits are increasingly being seen as innately evil and something to fight against, rather than appease.<sup>73</sup> The increasing anxiety about rampant evil is most evident in the numerous witchcraft accusations and panic about witchcraft activity in popular film and literature, in the media and in rumours and popular discourse concerning the (evil) spiritual dimension of this-worldly events.

### 1.6.2 *Increased evil – why?*

Scholars have identified various reasons for this preoccupation with evil in modern Africa. One reason comes from an historical analysis that considers Christian missionaries, whose message took root but was not understood or acted upon in exactly the way they had intended. Instead, most Africans, even upon converting to Christianity and becoming church leaders, merely incorporated it into their existing worldview.<sup>74</sup> As Gray argues, Christianity was understood as a fresh source of power within an African cosmological framework, ‘a powerful new reinforcement in the conflict with a radically differing concept of evil’.<sup>75</sup> This meant that most African Christians often simultaneously adhered to traditional religious structures without seeing any conflict between the two.<sup>76</sup>

Not only did missionaries fail to fully persuade people to have an exclusive reliance on a Western gospel, but their teachings were also appropriated through an African idiom. Meyer, for example, clearly shows how among the Ewe, the

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<sup>73</sup> Ellis and ter Haar, *Worlds*, 94.

<sup>74</sup> For comprehensive studies of early African Christianity, see Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa 1450-1950*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, 532; Steven Kaplan (ed.), *Indigenous Responses to Western Christianity*, New York: New York University Press, 1994. For post-colonial Christianity see Adrian Hastings, *A History of African Christianity 1950-75*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

<sup>75</sup> Richard Gray, *Black Christians and White Missionaries*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991, 99-101. See also Meyer, *Translating*, 85.

<sup>76</sup> With reference to Liberia, see Ellis, *The Mask*, 227.

missionaries' intended message that traditional spirits were not real and that belief in them was 'satanic' did not result in the eradication of spirit-belief.<sup>77</sup> Instead, the traditional spirit world was reinterpreted to be encompassed by the powerful realm of Satan and involved in a battle with an equally real but omnipresent and omnibenevolent God. This was further complicated by the different conceptions of agency between the missionaries and the Ewe. Sin, for example, was understood by missionaries as an act performed by a wicked individual, while the Ewe understood it as a hostile external force of Satan, 'something wicked', that the individual could not control.<sup>78</sup> Here one can see how the spirit world might grow to become coterminous with Satan's world and thus the ultimate source of all manifest evil. Because Christianity has for so many years demonised this African spirit world, the latter has 'lost much of its original morally neutral character'.<sup>79</sup>

A second reason that perceptions of rampant spiritual evil are widespread today is the neglect or misuse of traditional religious structures. For example, Ellis describes traditional Poro society in Liberia, in which 'there is no absolute good or evil but instead, an ambivalent power which is given moral meaning through ritual action'.<sup>80</sup> Traditionally, only those of a certain spiritual legitimacy were able to tap into the strongest sources of power; these individuals were also authorities in society because of their ability to access this power. The spirit of the forest ('Bush Devil'), for example, was an ambivalent but particularly powerful deity that needed to be

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<sup>77</sup> Meyer, *Translating*, 85-86. See also Donal Cruise O'Brien, 'Satan Steps Out From the Shadows: Religion and Politics in Africa' *Africa*; 70:3, 2000, 520; Gifford, *Ghana's*, 84-85; Maxwell, 'Delivered', 353; Todd M. Vanden Berg, 'Culture, Christianity, and Witchcraft in a West African Context', in Sanneh, Lamin and Joel Carpenter (eds.), *The Changing Face of Christianity: Africa, the West, and the World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 45-62.

<sup>78</sup> Meyer, *Translating*, 85-86.

<sup>79</sup> Ellis and ter Haar, *Worlds*, 94.

<sup>80</sup> Ellis, *The Mask*, 273-274.

supplied with blood sacrifice in order to ‘keep people in their proper places in society, to prevent individuals from transforming in ways which are dangerous to others and to ensure orderly progress from one phase of life to another, such as from childhood to adulthood. Because this concept was a ‘mainstay of culture order’, it was considered deeply problematic when the necessary sacrifices were not made according to Poro tradition by those who were of an appropriate spiritual rank.<sup>81</sup>

Over time, Poro became diffused by modernisation and monotheistic religion and the traditional Poro leaders lost much of their exclusive authority to deal with spirits and the power they offered. Because they lost control of the spirit world, the spirits were not appeased and thus became malevolent; the problems manifest today are thus perceived by some to be manifestations of these angry spirits.

A third reason that many people consider evil to be rampant is that the realities of life in Africa are extremely difficult: since the end of colonialism, life has become much harder for the majority of Africans. Where this-worldly events are believed to have their ultimate source in the spirit world, when famine, disease, war, poverty, political instability and crime are but a few of the problems plaguing the continent, one can see how this might indicate that the spirit world is imbalanced on the side of evil. Thus, spiritual anxiety might be a response to broader feelings of uncertainty or insecurity in Africa.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 278-279.

<sup>82</sup> ‘Anthropologists and, indeed, social scientists have generally treated uncertainty as a concept denoting non-recurrent and unpredictable phenomena that are intrinsically difficult to counteract, but affect the lives of individuals or a given group of people’. Haram and Yamba, *Dealing*, 13-14. Also, ‘the scale and impact of various kinds of catastrophes on the continent have been disproportionately huge in recent times... Weakening... the social fabric and traditional support networks, making life uncertain for the majority of Africans’, Haram and Yamba, *Dealing*, 11-12. See also Ashforth, ‘Reflections’, 62-3.

In response, many people turn to religious ideas, either exclusively or in combination with more ‘rational’ explanations, to explain the manifest evil.<sup>83</sup> Ashforth refers to the ‘spiritual insecurity’ that people in Soweto have in response to their existential insecurity: ‘the condition of danger, doubt and fear arising from exposure to the action of unseen forces bent upon causing harm’.<sup>84</sup> Chabal and Daloz similarly highlight the ‘bewildering array of possible sources of violence’ in explaining why Africans will ‘fall back on the most familiar resources’, which includes the use of ‘the irrational as a weapon for survival’.<sup>85</sup> Even in situations where people are relatively well off, the pressures of modernisation and its shortcomings still cause feelings of uncertainty and anxiety and thus still demand religious explanations.<sup>86</sup> Often these explanations take the form of discourses about witchcraft and other malevolent spiritual forces, sometimes manifest on earth as animals or people.<sup>87</sup> These beliefs and use of such discourses are not necessarily dependant on one’s education, social class, political power or urbanisation.<sup>88</sup>

A fourth argument pays closer attention to the growing inequality that has come with the combined effects of modernisation, corruption and economic mismanagement in post-colonial Africa. This has resulted in a just a few people acquiring unimaginable sums of money from physical sources unapparent to the

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<sup>83</sup> Haram and Yamba, *Dealing*, 14.

<sup>84</sup> Ashforth, ‘Reflections’, 63.

<sup>85</sup> Chabal and Daloz write, ‘In this world of disorder and in the face of such a bewildering array of possible sources of violence...The violence of ordinary life, therefore, becomes a powerful force for the ‘re-traditionalization’ of society.’ *Africa Works*, 81.

<sup>86</sup> Haram and Yamba, *Dealing*, 16, 23; Ezra Chintando, ‘“In the Beginning Was the Land”: The Appropriation of Religious Themes in Political Discourses In Zimbabwe’, *Africa*, 75:2, 2005, 42, 45

<sup>87</sup> See especially Geschiere, *Modernity*; Moore and Sanders, *Magical*; Comaroff and Comaroff, *Modernity*; M. Green, ‘Confronting’, 641.

<sup>88</sup> Haram and Yamba, *Dealing*, 20; Chintando, ‘Appropriation’, 42; Onyinah in Anderson, ‘Exorcism’, 122.

population, leading to the conclusion that the wealth was gained through malevolent and selfish spiritual actions. These newly rich people flaunt their wealth yet do little to help the masses of the poor. The problem with this situation is not necessarily that wealth was gained using spiritual means, but rather that if the excess wealth is not perceived to have been used for the greater good of the country, it invites all sorts of accusations that such wealth is illegitimate and therefore from a malevolent source.<sup>89</sup> Such logic applies to smaller communities as well, who may suspect an individual of witchcraft who accumulates wealth but does not share it with his or her family or the community. Such suspicion regarding wealth makes it ‘more important than ever for individuals to find ways of demonstrating that their wealth is legitimate if they wish to avoid being accused of witchcraft’.<sup>90</sup> This has resulted in many situations in which people are, as Ellis writes of Liberia, ‘uncertain as to the circumstances in which power may be used for morally legitimate purposes and those in which its use is illegitimate’.

#### *1.6.3 Making sense of and trying to address this rampant evil*

In the midst of this popular anxiety about evil, it is often unclear to people what exactly is going on in the spirit world, and why, so there is confusion regarding how to alleviate the problem.<sup>91</sup> In order to try to correct this perceived spiritual disorder and imbalance on the side of evil, and alleviate this spiritual confusion, there are increasingly new and varied religious ideas and practices, some more successful and

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<sup>89</sup> Birgit Meyer, ‘The Power of Money: Politics, Occult Forces, and Pentecostalism in Ghana’, *African Studies Review*, 41:3, 1998, 28-30.

<sup>90</sup> Ellis and ter Haar, *Worlds*, 129.

<sup>91</sup> Anderson, ‘Exorcism’, 21. See also Ashforth, ‘Reflections’, 65

enduring than others.<sup>92</sup> One example of an attempt to order the spirit world is described by Ellis. He explains how during the Liberian civil war in the 1990s, there were a number of reports that soldiers would kill their enemies and subsequently eat the heart in order to gain power. This might be considered a reflection of the belief that traditional sources and methods of obtaining power were no longer strong enough to enable people to fight these particularly difficult problems, manifest in the chaos, large-scale violence and brutality of soldiers experienced during the war, issues not ever encountered by most of the population prior. In order to try to effectively deal with these new challenges, people tried new spiritual techniques.<sup>93</sup>

Of course, despite the development of new techniques that practitioners claim will correct the spiritual imbalance, perceptions of rampant evil have endured. Some of these practitioners have evoked suspicions about whether or not these new techniques were legitimate; this might only be contributing to people's spiritual confusion. Ashforth, for example, in asking why there exists so much 'spiritual insecurity' in Soweto, suggests that

[the short answer] lies in the proliferation of interpretive authorities claiming to speak the truth about the action of invisible forces and entities and the inability of any particular form of authority to achieve dominance in making sense of a place where a superfluity of dangers, doubts, and fear engender pressing need for meaning.<sup>94</sup>

Another popular spiritual approach to making sense of and eliminating evil is found within charismatic and Pentecostal churches that are increasing across the continent. Such churches have developed spiritual models that aim to effectively and

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<sup>92</sup> Ellis and ter Haar, 'Religion and Politics', 194. See also Ellis and ter Haar, 'Taking African Epistemologies Seriously', 398.

<sup>93</sup> Ellis and ter Haar, 'Religion', 223-237; 259-266.

<sup>94</sup> Ashforth, 'Reflections', 65

definitively clarify everything that is evil and have embarked on a full-scale war against this evil using the only power necessary, the Holy Spirit. Since the 1990s, there has been a marked increase in charismatic churches claiming to have definitive methods for ridding an individual or community of malevolent spirits and consequently solving their problems. Below we focus on the scholarship that deals with this strand of African religiosity, particularly in terms of how it is responding to the perceived spiritual imbalance in modern Africa, and how this aspect of Pentecostalism relates to its popularity and socio-political role.

#### *1.6.4 The Pentecostal method for understanding and controlling evil*

That these churches focus so intently on this spiritual battle is often cited as a major reason for their popularity in Africa,<sup>95</sup> especially in contrast to mainline denominations that tend to shy away from such issues entirely. However, some scholars look more deeply into this worldview and argue that Pentecostalism is not just appealing to people because of its attention to African issues using an African idiom, but even more significantly because the way in which these idioms are used is meeting a deeper need for individuals by clarifying the nature of the spirit world and providing a truly relevant solution to its disorder. In analyses of the use of spiritual idioms in Pentecostal churches, scholars have found them to have particular relevance for a variety of existential pressures that people face. Because, as we have seen, the spirit world of post-colonial Africa is so widely regarded as disordered, unpredictable and inherently evil, it has been suggested that Pentecostal churches are popular

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<sup>95</sup> Gifford remarks that in Ghana, ‘...these churches have proliferated primarily because they profess to have the answers to Ghana’s real problems, expressed in an idiom to which many Ghanaians naturally respond’, Gifford, *Ghana’s*, 196. Meyer similarly finds that the ability of a Pentecostal church to attract members ultimately depends on the success they have in dealing with the influence of the devil in believers’ lives. Meyer, *Translating*, 145-6.

because they appeal to those who want a meaningful method of explaining, predicting and controlling events in their lives.

Most scholars in the field have considered the popularity of Pentecostalism to be at least partially a response to the critical changes in people's lives that have come with modernisation. Some attribute this popularity specifically to the relevant spiritual language and clear cosmological framework that accounts for modernity's disaffections. Significant tension is found between the modern ideal of individualisation and the traditional reality of needing to remain close to the family.<sup>96</sup> Pentecostal members are encouraged to form nuclear families and separate from extended families that may have malevolent spiritual ties. This may ultimately facilitate a Pentecostal's entry into the modern world as an autonomous individual. Despite this Pentecostal ideal for one to 'make a complete break with the past', this is not so easily done because, as Geschiere explains, 'Nearly everywhere in Africa, it is inconceivable, still today, to formally refuse maintaining family ties: the family remains the cornerstone of social life, and one cannot live without its intimacy'.<sup>97</sup>

Meyer acknowledges this tension in her description of women in Ghanaian Pentecostal churches, which, in spiritual idioms, encourage people to make a complete separation from their extended families in order to avoid malevolent spiritual influences. However, the reality of life in Ghana is that exclusive reliance on oneself and one's nuclear family is not so easy; therefore, women are reluctant to totally separate from old ties.<sup>98</sup> This tension is also put into spiritual idioms: inability

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<sup>96</sup> 'The enigmatic discourse on witches and their secret forces will continue to mark people's reactions to modern changes in Africa'. Geschiere, *The Modernity*, 213-214.

<sup>97</sup> This tension, he argues, becomes manifest in spiritual idioms, particularly witchcraft accusations. *Ibid*, 212.

<sup>98</sup> Meyer, *Translating*, 187, 195.

to ‘make a complete break with the past’ is perceived to be a result of Satan’s endless attacks and possession by evil spirits. Because of this circular process,

Members are enabled to mediate between the indigenous attitudes towards spirits and Christianity and at the same time face the contradiction that their daily lives actually fit with neither indigenous nor modern Christian ideals [that] enables people to move back and forth between the way of life they (wish to) have left behind and the one to which they aspire.<sup>99</sup>

Shaw has suggested that Pentecostal spirit idioms help war-affected Sierra Leonean youth make sense of and act upon the problems they face, and has thus helped them to recover from the trauma they experienced during the war:

By ‘forgetting’ the war as a direct realist account and relocating it to an Underworld that can be fought through prayer and exorcism in their refashioned deliverance ministry, [the church's] youth seek to displace their war memories by the Holy Spirit... They learn to experience their memories in ways that enable them to be worked on, fought, and transformed in the very same way that Sierra Leone’s war can itself be worked on, fought and transformed.<sup>100</sup>

Thus Pentecostal spirit idioms were able to help people deal with very sensitive issues in both culturally relevant and spiritual relevant ways.<sup>101</sup>

What most of the above scholars agree upon is that the Pentecostal worldview regarding the battle between good and evil is an appealing way to understand and deal with this-worldly problems, which are perceived to be manifestations of disorder in the spirit world. It forms a coherent and relevant framework within which people can think about and act upon these spiritual realities. Some scholars go even further and

<sup>99</sup> Meyer, *Translating*, 209-212. See also; Birgit Meyer, “‘Make a Complete Break with the past.’ Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse’, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 28:3, 1998, 316-349. For anthropology related to spirit possession, see Simon Barrington-Ward, “The centre cannot hold...”: spirit possession as redefinition’ in Fasholé-Luke, E. et al. (eds.), *Christianity in Independent Africa*, London: Rex Collings, 1978, 455-470; Janice Boddy, ‘Spirit Possession Revisited: Beyond Instrumentality’, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 23:2, 1994, 407-434; J. Beattie and Middleton, J., *Spirit Mediumship and Society in Africa*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969.

<sup>100</sup> Rosalind Shaw, ‘Displacing Violence: Making Pentecostal Memory in Postwar Sierra Leone’, *Cultural Anthropology*, 1:22, 2007, 89.

<sup>101</sup> Shaw, ‘Displacing’, 89; See also Alcinda Honwana, ‘Negotiating Post-war Identities: Child soldiers in Mozambique and Angola, *CODESIRA Bulletin*, 1999, 7.

imply that the Pentecostal worldview not only provides attractive ways to think about and deal with problems, but effectively alleviates the spiritual confusion.<sup>102</sup> However, other observers of Pentecostalism have shown how Pentecostalism contributed to enduring spiritual confusion among adherents.<sup>103</sup> What this brief overview of varieties of Pentecostal idioms and their uses has shown is that one must neither assume that all churches and their believers' perceptions of the spirit world and their role in their physical life are the same, nor that these perceptions are fixed over time. Thus, it should be clear that, as Robbins and others have asserted, Pentecostal spiritual discourses mean different things in different places<sup>104</sup>, and each must be considered within its unique cultural and temporal context in order to comprehensively understand their popularity and implications. It is also important to realise that it is difficult to judge specific socio-political roles that Pentecostal spiritual discourses may play; a debate surrounding this difficulty will be outlined below.

#### *1.6.5 Measuring implicit political and social engagement*

Some argue that although Pentecostals may tend to avoid explicit engagement with social or political issues, they are nonetheless dealing with these issues in a language that is difficult for the Western observer to appreciate or notice, and that there are

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<sup>102</sup> Ellis and ter Haar, 'Religion and Politics', 200-201. Ellis and ter Haar, *Worlds*, 148-149. Meyer, 'The Power', 17-18; Shaw, 'Displacing', 88-9.

<sup>103</sup> Emma Wild, "Is It Witchcraft? Is It Satan? It Is a Miracle." Mai-Mai Soldiers and Christian Concepts of Evil in North-East Congo', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 28:4, 1998, 451. See also Catrine Christiansen, 'Conditional Certainties: Ugandan "Savedees" Struggling for Health and Harmony' in Haram and Yamba, *Dealing*, 49-56; Smith, 'Arrow', 600-601.

<sup>104</sup> Joel Robbins, 'The Globalization of Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 33, 2004; see also Shaw, 'Displacing', 70; Meyer, *Translating*; Maxwell 'Delivered'; Brusco, *Reformation*.

implicit political and social ramifications of this type of engagement.<sup>105</sup> When Pentecostals put everything in spiritual terms, this is not merely a way that they try to understand and feel in control of physical events, but they are also forming a ‘new basis for legitimising power’ and ‘restructuring [an] apparatus that fulfils functions of government’.<sup>106</sup> The potential for religion to have political implications is increased, they argue, when the state is largely unable to fulfil its expected functions, although even states with strong foundations can still be affected by religious movements looking to reorder power: ‘In effect, many forms of religious revival challenge the very bases of legitimacy of states which operate through institutions and norms of governance originally created in colonial times’.<sup>107</sup>

Meyer argues that such discourse is having an actual effect on politics because of the popular idea that evil spirits are key players: ‘attempts to reveal occult sources of power and money certainly constitute a critical political act, albeit criticism raised from within’.<sup>108</sup> Geschiere similarly remarks that Pentecostal churches can be considered a ‘redoubtable force in postcolonial Africa for the future because of their public witch-cleansing rituals.<sup>109</sup> By dealing with power on the spiritual level, which has relevance for all of society but is outside the physical world’s controls, Pentecostals might be considered to be effective actors who, by claiming to reorder

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<sup>105</sup> Ellis and ter Haar point out that in the future, due to inadequate governance, insufficient resources and insecurity, non-state actors will have a much greater role in the keeping the African state afloat. ‘This is almost certain to involve institutions of a religious nature and may be expressed in an idiom that is unfamiliar to many secular development agencies’ in ‘The role’, 359. See also Meyer: ‘[Pentecostalism provides] fields within which people produce meanings, enabling them to analyze critically and thereby shape their life conditions’ in Meyer, “Delivered from the Powers of Darkness”: Confessions of Satanic Riches in Christian Ghana’, *Africa*, 65:2, 1995, 237. See also Meyer, ‘The Power’, 16-17, 27-32.

<sup>106</sup> Ellis and ter Haar, ‘Religion and Politics’, 201.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 193.

<sup>108</sup> Meyer, ‘The Power’, 25.

<sup>109</sup> Geschiere, *Modernity*, 205-206.

the spirit world, are actually creating a situation in which physical changes result. Ellis and ter Haar go even further in suggesting that for many in Africa the only way that society can become stable is for people to first perceive some degree of control over the spirit world.<sup>110</sup>

Despite all these scholars' valuable insights into the general idea that Pentecostalism helps people to make sense of their world and gives them strategies to be active in changing it, tangible examples of the actual socio-political role of such a worldview are lacking, leaving them open to some criticism. One such critic of this approach to understanding the implicit role of Pentecostalism is Gifford, who does not outwardly dismiss the possibility that these churches could be contributing to social and political development: 'This might be an implicit way of challenging malfunctioning political systems', but that there is not any clear evidence of this occurring.<sup>111</sup> He considers both Meyer and Ellis and ter Haar to have made an 'unexplained jump' from showing how religious imagery helps make sense of a situation to arguing that it has an effect on the political situation. Gifford asks, 'What might the effects of this critique [of power, and of its uses and abuses in politics and society] be for the re-ordering of socio-political life? How could we identify them? We are not told'.<sup>112</sup> All of their work does show, however, that to even begin answering this question requires an in-depth look at the spiritual world and the way it presides over this-worldly power.

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<sup>110</sup> Ellis and ter Haar, 'Religion and Politics', 186.

<sup>111</sup> Gifford, *Ghana's*, 189-190.

<sup>112</sup> Paul Gifford, 'Review: Ellis and ter Haar, *Worlds of Power*', in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 35:2, 2005, 246-248.



## **CHAPTER 02**

### ***The research***

#### ***2.1 Questions***

My motivation for pursuing a PhD that deals with Pentecostalism in Africa stemmed from two broad questions. First, I had a fascination with the huge growth of Pentecostalism around the world and wanted to explore more what it is about Pentecostalism that makes it so popular in such different cultural contexts. Second, through my years of studying religion, I became certain that one must consider the religious worldviews of people in order to fully understand the wider socio-political climate in which they live. Though many studies have been conducted that deal with these questions, there had been none that considered a country that had been ruined by war. I wanted to explore what the unique role(s) of Pentecostalism might be in such a context, and thus decided to conduct fieldwork in Liberia.

#### ***2.2 The research***

The research for this thesis was undertaken from September 2007 until July 2008, in May 2009, and July 2010, primarily in the capital, Monrovia, though at least twenty trips were taken outside of Monrovia to measure any major differences between the urban and rural contexts. I assumed the role of participant-observer in three Monrovia churches that I decided upon as case-studies: Winners' Chapel, Sinkor United Pentecostal Church (SUPC) and Christian Evangelistic Pentecostal Church and Ministry (CEPC/CHRISEM). I spent most of my time attending services and conversing with and interviewing countless members of the selected churches. I became a virtual insider, being included in every activity that they held and having

access to every leader and member within each church. In one of the churches I was even asked to join the ‘Secretariat’ unit for the duration of my fieldwork and had access to church files, finances and meetings. While I would never become a true insider, having the identity of a young white non-Pentecostal American woman, I was able to conduct fieldwork freely and undoubtedly gained invaluable data. I was acutely aware of the benefits and the drawbacks that my identity entailed, and the questions I asked in addition to my subsequent analyses of the data took my identity into consideration. Whenever I had extra time, I attended services of other Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal churches and spoke with their members. In addition to participant observation, much research was conducted through phone interviews, reading church publications and national newspapers and listening to the radio.

During the first phase of fieldwork from 2007 to 2008, I went to 20 crusade meetings, 33 revivals, 23 pastor conferences, 16 bible studies, 13 prayer/deliverance meetings, 47 Sunday services, 19 mid-week services, 20 Sunday schools, 16 women’s group meetings, 3 membership classes, 14 street preaching gatherings, 6 workshops put on by faith-based groups, 5 days of personal deliverance rituals, one funeral, one wedding, one day of city wide evangelism, one pastor ordination, and listened to 37 taped sermons in churches that I visited at least once. All these events encompassed 27 different churches: mainline, Pentecostal, charismatic, non-mainline evangelical, and ‘spiritist’ AICs. I and a research assistant conducted over 600 short interviews with residents of Monrovia, and I conducted 32 long interviews with leaders and members of Pentecostal and mainline churches and organizations. In the second and third phases of research, most of my time was spent re-interviewing key informants

and conducting informal interviews with Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal Liberians regarding more specific issues surrounding transitional justice.

Because most of my research involved conversing with and interviewing countless members of selected churches, often informally, and attending dozens of different church events, for manageability most quotations from interviews and services will not be cited in full. Where no names and dates are given, the quotations should be understood to be from an ordinary representative member. When it is significant, the name of the interviewee and the church he or she belongs to will be given. Many services and interviews were also conducted in Liberian English or in both Standard and Liberian English. All quotations in Liberian English have been translated into Standard English.

The three case-study churches were purposefully chosen because of certain features that differerd amongst them, each of which represented a ‘type’ of Pentecostal/charismatic church in Liberia. Winners’ was chosen because of its size, both in terms of number of active members, and in terms of the size of its worship building. It was also chosen because of its external links to Nigeria. Finally, it was chosen because relatively many of its members were clearly middle to upper class Monrovians (indicated by their reported jobs, the cars they drove and their clothing). Sinkor United Pentecostal Church was chosen because it was smaller than Winners’ Chapel both in terms of numbers of active members and the size of the church itself, but was still a relatively large church in Monrovia. It was also chosen because it had branches throughout the country, and because it had historical and contemporary links to the UPC church in the US. While there were certainly a few better-off members at SUPC, most of the congregation was poor. Christian

Evangelistic Pentecostal Church and Ministry was chosen because it was small, and because it was locally founded and run, with few external links. The members of CEPC were, compared to the other churches, very poor. While there were dozens of churches of this variety to choose from, these churches were also convenient to study together because of the timing of their Sunday services: I could attend all three on a single Sunday. In visiting the dozens of other churches around Monrovia, I became confident that these three case study churches were an excellent representation of the types of Pentecostal churches available in the city. More details surrounding these churches is provided below.

### ***2.3 Introduction of case-studies***

#### ***2.3.1 Winners' Chapel***

Winners' Chapel Liberia is just one branch of the massive ministry, David Oyedepo Ministries International, founded in Nigeria in 1981 by now-Bishop David Oyedepo. It boasts the largest church building in the world – seating 50,000 inside and capacity for 250,000 outside – just outside of Lagos, Nigeria. It has branches in over fifty countries around the world, an international Bible College and a publishing house. Having had such incredible success throughout the world in terms of church growth, Winners' has a distinct advantage in that they come with years of experience in how evangelism is most effectively done, and plenty of start-up capital for church-planting. Winners' has the biggest single-church congregation in Liberia – more than 3,000 attendants every Sunday – and is rapidly growing. In 2010 they opened two more locations, each about two hours outside of Central Monrovia. Within Monrovia, however, Winners' is the only church under consideration that concentrates all of its

members into one massive building, on the main road in between the crowded suburb of Paynesville and Central Monrovia.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, for most people, getting to church involves somewhat of a journey – most cannot simply walk there.<sup>2</sup> However, Winners' leaders consider having a mega-church to ultimately attract more members because it is so big – indeed, it is impossible to miss and every Monrovian knows where it is.

Winners' also has ample resources; far more than most churches of any sort in Liberia. In early 2008, professionally-made banners advertising the church began appearing all over Monrovia and the suburbs.<sup>3</sup> In every Sunday service, and some Wednesdays, ushers handed out invitation cards for the members to give to their friends and family, professionally made on high-quality cardboard and with a space to write the invitee's name. They also distributed free one-page pamphlets and newsletters, outlining the basics of the ministry's beliefs, programmes and goals.<sup>4</sup> Winners' will also appear in newspapers and on the radio to advertise an upcoming event, or to 'report' on the message that was given the previous Sunday service.

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<sup>1</sup> Among all of the churches in Monrovia, there are only a few that are based around a single location. One, Jireh, has Nigerian roots as well. Philadelphia and Victory Temple are other single-structure mega-churches. Other mega-churches like Bethel World Outreach have a main building, but numerous smaller churches throughout Monrovia.

<sup>2</sup> However, being in between Central Monrovia and Red Light makes the journey for those coming from either direction significantly easier than if the churches located within either area. It is, for Monrovia and its suburbs, actually quite Central. However, very few would attend because they simply 'live close by', because there are relatively few residences nearby, and very many churches. This is in contrast to a number of respondents from other churches who visited simply because it was the closest one to their house (though people certainly discriminated based on whether it was mainline, Pentecostal or other).

<sup>3</sup> Generally, banners are hand-made with paint and fabric.

<sup>4</sup> Though small pieces of paper may seem a very minimal amount of evangelism for a country, in Liberia a free sheet of paper that is professionally made is valued; it will be taken home and passed around the community for everyone to see. Even if a small paper flyer is being distributed, crowds will swarm around whoever is distributing it, to ensure they get one. Within other Pentecostal churches, too, it isn't uncommon for informational pamphlets to be sold for 10LD (roughly \$0.15 USD).

The social demographic of the church is very mixed – there are certainly a number of obviously affluent Liberians in attendance, judging from the cars they drive, their clothing, and the jobs they testify to having. However, most Liberians are poor, there is no middle class, so many of these individuals are in attendance as well. There are roughly equal numbers of men and women in attendance on Sundays and in mid-week services; at each of these events, nearly everyone has a Bible, notepad and pen with them.

Winners' Chapel services are very carefully planned; the schedule for the event is organised to the minute and these times are kept. On Sunday, service begins at 8am, although for the first hour there is a seemingly unorganized (but carefully timed) period of praise and worship. During this time people come in, but the venue is not filled until 9 a.m.; people continue to come in until 10am. As one enters the building, no less than ten ushers work together in directing each person to their seat. There are nearly 40 ushers at every service, each distinctly dressed and wearing a badge that reads, 'Usher Unit'. Others stand still around the church with badges that read, 'Protocol'. Before the sermon begins, the eight ushers carry around large signs telling people to turn off their mobile phone. The order of events is the same every Sunday and Wednesday (although the Wednesday service is one hour shorter): praise and worship, occasional teachings, testimonial, more praise and worship, announcements, praise and worship, sermon, altar call(s) for first-time visitors and those who have for the first time given their life to Christ, communion of small pieces of bread and small cups of red sugar water performed at 8 individual stations around the building and then a closing prayer.

The sermon lasts for exactly 45 minutes and is interactive: one is consistently asked to ‘Tell your neighbour’ something or to ‘stand up’ and cheer or jump up and down. The preaching is focused on a key Biblical text and theme, and is very loud and often repetitive. For example, the pastor might say, ‘Tomorrow I will get my miracle car’, or ‘I am crossing over’ and instruct the congregation to repeat after him, nearly 50 times in one sermon. On the last Sunday of every month is an anointing service, which takes place after the sermon.

Everyone is expected to bring his or her own olive oil, available for purchase at the bookstore. The pastor prays for the oil and then everyone pours it into their hands; the pastor continues praying until everyone is instructed to put the oil on their foreheads. Once the anointing is complete, people rub the oil over their arms and heads. If a person is without oil, it is common for someone else to give them some of theirs. This anointing service occurs after communion and just before the closing prayer. After closing prayer, all first-timers and those who have given their life are instructed to stay after and sit in a designated area for counselling. This practice changed over the time of the fieldwork; in September 2007 it was a simple gathering during which people were welcomed personally and given more information about the church. By June 2008 new-comers were given bags of water, biscuits and pamphlets.

Winners’ Chapel is best known, in all its locations, as a prosperity-gospel church. This is certainly no different in Monrovia. Most of the sermons have something to do with an individual’s right to riches as promised by God – the only thing that is stopping them is faith. They are also very insistent on the necessity to pay your tithe – 10% minimum as you receive any money, and any extra offerings so that God can

bless you more. On Sunday, every offering is expected to be packaged in an envelope, available for purchase at the bookstore, and is placed in a basket that is passed around.

On Mondays is the membership class, a one-time class which all newcomers are expected to attend before they become full members of the church. The class lasts for about 3 hours, and is conducted in 5 parts – 4 ‘levels’ of teaching given by 4 different instructors. The class is interactive and people are expected to answer questions when they are asked or read aloud. The finale is learning how to speak in tongues. It is expected that everyone learn to speak in tongues at this point; if they do not, then they considered to be lacking in faith.<sup>5</sup> In 2008 Winner’s began to organize cell groups in different parts of Monrovia, held at church members’ houses, schools or other vacant buildings. In 2009 the pastors of Winners’ changed, as is typical of the ministry. Pastor Solomon from Nigeria and Pastor Martins from Cameroon were the head pastors until April 2009; two Liberian pastors, Pastor Philemon and Pastor Jesse replaced them and as of August 2010 are still there.

### 2.3.2 *Sinkor United Pentecostal Church (SUPC)*

Sinkor United Pentecostal Church is distinct from the other churches under consideration in that it was established by the United Pentecostal Church in the 1950s and has received financial and administrative support through the years. Other branches of UPC have been opened throughout the country. By 2008 in Liberia, there

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<sup>5</sup> I went through this class with about 20 people was the only one that did not ‘learn’ to speak in tongues. Because of this, the class ran overtime as they continued to try to teach me.

were a reported 86 branches of UPC, composed of nearly 10,000 total members.<sup>6</sup>

SUPC is the first UPC established and the only one in central Monrovia, with a membership of over one-thousand. It is the largest building they have, serves as the headquarters where most of the administration takes place, and it has a school attached. SUPC will often work in collaboration with nearby branches of UPC in events held in and around Monrovia; they will also host visiting UPC pastors from rural areas.

UPC held one national crusade during the fieldwork period, held in Monrovia and featuring two UPC ministers from the US. Their ambition is to host two such national crusades every year. SUPC had its own evangelism programmes and events designed to attract more members to the church. A prominent method of outreach for the church is their weekly radio programme, 'Hour of Power', which is broadcast on the state radio station ELBC every Saturday evening. They occasionally distribute pamphlets and invitation cards for members to give to their friends and family. A number of units exist whose purpose is to walk around their community and evangelise to people they see. Also, church members are always encouraged to visit the widows, orphans, sick or disabled who are not members, to minister to them and convince them to come to church. There are also periodic awareness walks and

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<sup>6</sup> Their reports claim to have '25,000 persons in attendance' but do not specify the exact number of members; church leaders claimed to have 'many thousands of members'. They do not give an exact number for registered members, but according to the 2008 report, their goal is to reach 10,000 members; 30,000 attendants. Also according to this report, there were reported 2 UPC churches in GCM, 13 in Bomi, 16 in Monterrado, 6 in Margibi, 12 in Grand Bassa, 8 in Bong, 16 in Gbarpolu, 2 in Nimba, 11 in Sinoe and 0 in the rest of the counties..

‘special services’ which are advertised to be for ‘new members’ to come see the church.<sup>7</sup>

SUPC has an event on every day of the week except Monday: Tuesday is Men’s Fellowship; Wednesday is Women’s Fellowship followed by a prayer meeting and then the Mid-Week Service; Thursday is Bible Study; Friday is the Youth Meeting; Saturday is the choir practice (which members are invited to attend), and on Sunday is Sunday school, Prayer meeting and Sunday worship that lasts for at least three hours but sometimes as long as five. Services start on time but sometimes praise and worship goes longer than usual, the preaching ranges from thirty minutes to an hour and a half, and there are periodically additional fundraising activities that can take up to an hour. Still, the schedule of events is similar to that of Winners’: praise and worship, announcements and introductions, testimonies, song selections, offerings (sometimes up to four), sermon, another offering, and a closing prayer. There are roughly 60% women and 40% men. Three of the pastors are men – the head pastor is Dr. Stephen Benda, and one is a woman – Sister Margaret.

### 2.3.3 *CEPC/CHRISEM*

The third case study is the only Liberian-founded church, Christian Evangelistic Pentecostal Church (CEPC). The founders are head pastor Reverend Christian Dagadu and his wife Reverend Precious Dagadu. The church was established ‘for the

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<sup>7</sup> Their second pillar of numerical growth is: ‘To recruit and establish a minimum constituency (church attendance) of 30,000 persons and a minimum registered membership of 10,000 persons who believe in and are committed to upholding the doctrine of the UPCL and the overall growth of the church through their active participation and contribution to church activities; Strategies: Each One, Bring One, Open-air Services, Community Evangelism, Visitations to Church Members and visitors, Church Information Materials (brochures, placards, etc), Crusades, Awareness Walks. Cited from 2008 UPC vision statement, in author’s possession.

purposes of winning lost souls to Jesus Christ'; this statement appears on most of their pamphlets, reports and banners. The CEPC headquarter church is in central Monrovia; there are two other churches in Monrovia's suburbs, and 2 churches in other counties.<sup>8</sup> The Dagadus also founded a ministry, Christian Evangelistic Ministries (CHRISEM) that always incorporates CEPC into its activities, and CEPC members are generally participate in CHRISEM's activities. Therefore, we will be generally be referring to this church and ministry together as CEPC/CHRISEM.

CEPC/CHRISEM is distinct in that they hold crusades, revivals and conferences whose attendance, frequency and geographical reach are unprecedented in Liberia. CEPC/CHRISEM organised its first crusade in 2005 in Monrovia: 'Breaking the Siege Over Liberia', which was

intended to break demonic strongholds and to remove the dark cloud of oppression, suppression, and depression and declare an opened heaven for Liberia....envisaged that the breaking of the siege would result to the country and its people experiencing a new day.

Because of the success of that crusade, in terms of the number of 'lives given to Christ', later in 2005 they launched another with the theme 'Walking under an Opened Heaven' and the motto, 'Aimed at creating an opportunity for people to experience God's blessings', which has remained the theme for every year since. In 2008 they held seven week-long crusades in Liberia; one in Sierra Leone; in 2009 they had ten, all held during 'crusade season' over the dry months.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Branches around Monrovia are in Paynesville, New Georgia and Downtown; there is one branch in Unification Town, Margibi (on the road to the airport), and there is one branch in 'the bush' in Sinoe County.

<sup>9</sup> The 'crusade season' begins at the beginning of the dry season. In December 2007 the crusade team travelled to Sierra Leone for two weeks. Beginning in January, they held week-long crusades in all of Monrovia's suburbs (Gardnesville, Paynesville, Barnesville, New Kru Town), and in two other counties (Unification Town in Margibi and Buchanan, Liberia's third biggest city).

These events were by not strictly for the purposes of attracting members to CEPC or CHRISEM-affiliated churches. Although it was clear that it was CEPC/CHRISEM putting on the event, the pastors encouraged those in the crowd to become members of ‘any Bible-believing church’ or ‘a born-again church your area’. More than that, many of their crusades were held far away from any of their branches. For this reason, and backed up by interviews with church leaders, it is clear that CEPC/CHRISEM’s motivation for organising these events was to evangelise to the country generally, not to grow only their own church. As Revered Dagadu told me, the crusades were done in order to ‘demonstrate what God can do’ so that people might at least be encouraged to change their ways’.

CEPC/CHRISEM is also unique because of its deliverance clinic, open every weekday and offering personal deliverance to anybody who asks for it and undergoes the necessary prerequisites. Although it caters specifically to Christians who are already born-again, it undoubtedly attracts people curious to know more about what type of services they can get from this, whether they are born again or not. The clinic is advertised at the crusades, within affiliated churches, and by a large sign on the main road of Sinkor. Rev. Dagadu had a radio programme in 2006-2007, during which many Monrovians became familiar with his name and the deliverance clinic. The church’s main method of advertising comes from word of mouth from those who have attended a CHRISEM crusade or the clinic, or who are already members of CEPC. During these services, all members are frequently encouraged to bring friends and family members to future events and services. The congregation is made up of about 65% women and 35% men; all but one of the head pastors are men; the head

pastor of the Central Church is Reverend Dagadu's Wife (referred from here on as Rev. Mrs. Dagadu).

## 2.4 Methodology

### 2.4.1 Planning fieldwork

As a student of the Study of Religions, I have a certain amount of methodological freedom. Such flexibility can be very useful, but it is not without criticism.<sup>10</sup> The debate I was entering was addressed by a variety of disciplines, as most scholars of religion are used to. So, before entering the field, instead of developing a formal methodological framework, I decided on my basic approach, some possibilities I might consider depending on what I encountered, and left the rest to be determined. My basic approach was to be a methodologically agnostic<sup>11</sup> observer as participant, that I would be doing interviews, and I knew that I would make them as open-ended as possible, so as to not 'lead' my informants to answer questions as I expected them to; I planned on focusing on three churches as case-studies, but also to attend other Christian events and churches when I had the time, to gauge my cases studies in relation to the Christian scene generally.

A major issue I was concerned about before entering the field was my non-Pentecostal and non-born again identity, especially because I knew I would be asked the question, 'Are you born again' or 'Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour' or some variety of it, and that I wanted to be completely honest and ethical with my research. So, I planned on responding to such a question

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<sup>10</sup> Rosalind Hackett, 'Field Envy: or, the Perils and Pleasures of Doing Fieldwork.' *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 13: 2001, 98-109.

<sup>11</sup> Ninian Smart, *The Science of Religion & the Sociology of Knowledge: Some Methodological Questions: Some Methodological Questions*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973.

by saying ‘Well, it depends how you look at it...’ and highlighting that I was a water-baptised Christian, Episcopalian to be specific, and in the past was a member of a charismatic Episcopalian church, all true statements, but that I had never been ‘baptised in the spirit’, the Pentecostal mark for a true born-again Christian. I would not volunteer the information that I did not believe in speaking in tongues, deliverance and the end-times, but if asked, I would answer truthfully. I also would not volunteer details about my personal life which most Pentecostals might not approve of, but if was asked specifically about it (and the question wasn’t inappropriate), I would be honest. Ethically, of course, I intended to make it as clear as possible that I was visiting their church for fieldwork purposes; not to worship, be converted, or to help them in any way. Because of all of this, I was worried that I would be considered such an outsider that I would not be unable to gain access to the information I wanted. I knew I would probably be recognized as the non-born-again and non-willing-to-convert ‘other’ among this group, but my aim was to make that as little obvious as possible. I wasn’t entirely sure how this would play out, or how I would address any problems should I be excluded from researching certain aspects of the churches because of my identity, or if my research on the church would be affected because of the churches’ attempts to convert me, but like all other things, I figured I best just go and see what happened.

#### *2.4.2 Gaining access*

The leaders of each church were very open to my researching them; Reverend Dagadu of CEPC and Pastor Benda of SUPC had studied sociology at the University of Liberia and understood quite well that I would be visiting their churches purely for

qualitative research purposes. It was nearly two weeks before anybody in the churches asked about my Christian status, to which I responded as planned. Nobody seemed troubled by this although they did frequently tell me that they were praying for me to be born again and to grow spiritually, and I was occasionally the subject of group prayers during services.

My fieldwork method with the churches evolved as I went along, beginning with an approach to simply be friendly, respectful, eager to listen and make an effort to take part in any activity or service that they were having. This seemed to work, as I was immediately included in all of the events that the church was holding.

CEPC was particularly welcoming: after two months they made me a member of the crusade Secretariat, whose job was, among other things, to count offering money at large events. I also worked in the office whenever they needed me, transcribing people's testimonies, folding envelopes, and producing the ministry's first newsletter. For a few weeks I played guitar in church band practices. I went with them on city-wide evangelising rallies, and they included me in all the events they were holding, both inside and outside Monrovia, encouraging me to sing, dance, pray and even be a guest speaker at their services to talk about, 'whatever is important to say'. When a service wasn't going on, I would spend my time with the church women, cooking food, singing, gossiping and watching Nigerian films, or with the church men, usually watching American Christian DVDs or just talking about Liberia and the church. With such access, I was gaining a huge amount of information through my observations, interviews, informal discussions and overheard conversations. I was effectively an active member of the church, but I was lacking the most important quality for what they considered to be a true Christian: I was not born-again. I

repeatedly made my role clear, and whenever somebody would try to get me to 'give my life to Christ', I would explain that this was not the reason I was visiting the church. While I was an active member, I explained, this was simply so that I could learn as much as possible. I was always very frank about my opinions about their ideas and practices – that I did not believe them but that I respected the fact that they did – maintaining my methodological agnosticism.

## CHAPTER 03

### *Liberia: The social, political and religious context*

#### ***3.1 The Post-colonial African State***

The post-colonial African state has been characterised by political instability, wars, plunging economies, corruption, poor human rights records and a lack of democratic consolidation. There is ample scholarship reaching back decades that attempts to understand the way politics works in Africa today and the reasons the continent is still dealing with so many problems. Much of the current scholarship deals with the extent to which there is democratic consolidation in Africa. It is important to consider both the extent to which African states are characterised by government efficiency, accountability and popular legitimacy, and also extent to which the citizens of African hold these democratic ideals.<sup>1</sup> Optimistic theorists consider the progress towards democratic consolidation in Africa to be slow but on the right track; pessimists argue that attempts towards democratic consolidation are a futile endeavour in Africa. Still others see neo-liberal democracy as a legitimate goal for Africa, but the routes taken towards this goal to be unique from those Western observers might expect and encourage. The arguments involved in this debate will be briefly considered below.

##### ***3.1.1 Western ideas of progress and how to get there***

For optimists like Larry Diamond, the development of a vibrant civil society, which he describes as ‘an intermediary entity, standing between the private sphere

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<sup>1</sup> For considerations of democratisation in Africa, see John Wiseman (ed.), *Democracy and Political Change in Sub-Saharan Africa*, London: Routledge, 1993; D. Olowu, et. al. (eds.), *Governance and Democratisation in West Africa*, Senegal: CODESRIA, 1999.

and the state', will be able to address the problems of corrupt and inefficient governments.<sup>2</sup> It is within these associations that, these optimists claim, are found the necessary elements that contribute to a successful democracy, by providing a venue in which popular opinion can keep an overly authoritarian, inept or corrupt head of state in check by demanding accountability and efficiency.<sup>3</sup> Certainly, one can observe the huge increase in such organisations, usually in the form of local or Western non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that are the increasingly the channels of foreign aid. From some perspectives, churches are also considered to be a type of civil society.

However, some scholars question the relevance and utility of civil society because of the unique (non-Western) nature of African 'political culture' that does not fit within Western political models. It is well-documented that much of African politics is still largely based on a system of patrimonialism, through which political elites distribute resources to their 'constituencies' (clients) in order to maintain power, which is the ruling elite's primary concern (as opposed to addressing national issues or the demands of the opposition).<sup>4</sup> This is in great contrast to Western political systems, in which a 'proper' institutionalisation requires political elites to 'accept both the supremacy of institutions over individuals and the temporary nature of their

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<sup>2</sup> According to Diamond, 'Civil society is the realm of organised social life that is voluntary, self-generating (largely), self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules. This is distinct from "society" in general in that it involves citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express their interests, passions, and ideas, exchange information, achieve mutual goals, make demands on the state, and hold state officials accountable. Civil society is an intermediary entity, standing between the private sphere and the state.' Larry Diamond, 'Toward Democratic Consolidation', *Journal of Democracy*, 5:3, 1994, 5-6. For an alternative perspective on civil society, see especially Nelson Kasfir (ed.), *Civil Society and Democracy in Africa*, London: Frank Cass, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Diamond, 'Toward', 4-16.

<sup>4</sup> Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works*, 54-56. See also Paul Nugent, *Big Men, Small Boys and Politics in Ghana: power, ideology and the burden of history, 1982-1994*, Accra: Asempra Publishers, 1996.

political eminence'.<sup>5</sup> In a patrimonial system, if the state is unable to deliver resources to its clients, its legitimacy is effectively lost so the state must find other ways to maintain power, usually by silencing opposition or co-opting other clients.<sup>6</sup>

Acknowledging these unique political realities, some scholars doubt the possibility of a Western-style democracy functioning in Africa. Bayart brought this argument into the forefront of political science by emphasising the importance of the 'historicity of the African state' to explain why Western political models do not work.<sup>7</sup> This perspective is extensively built upon by Chabal and Daloz who argue that there is a tendency for African politics to encourage disorder, which enables African leaders to maintain their rule and carry out their specific goals. They further explore the possibility that despite the apparent political, economic and cultural 'crisis' of Africa, we need not see this as a backward step in development but instead consider Africa to simply 'work' in its own distinctly modern way.<sup>8</sup> Their general conclusion is that there is a coherent politics of disorder that has become a resource for political elites; this may result in a

lack of incentive to work for a more institutionalised ordering of society and a tendency to link politics to realms of increased disorder, be it war or crime... an inbuilt bias in favour of greater disorder and against the foundation of the Western-style legal, administrative and institutional foundations required for development.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>6</sup> I. William Zartman, (ed.), *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995. For more on patrimonialism, see Max Amadu Sesay, 'Paradise Lost and Regained? The Travails of Democracy in Sierra Leone', in Olowu, D., et. al. (eds.), *Governance and Democratisation in West Africa*, Senegal: CODESRIA, 1999; David Luke & Stephen Riley, 'The Politics of Economic Decline in Sierra Leone', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 27:1, 1989, 133-141.

<sup>7</sup> Jean-Francois Bayart, *The State in Africa: the Politics of the Belly*, London: Longman, 1993, viii.

<sup>8</sup> Chabal & Daloz, *Africa Works*, 64-65; Bayart, *The State*, 221.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, *Africa Works*, xix. See also, Jean-Francois Bayart, et. al., *The Criminalization of the State in Africa*, Oxford: James Currey, 1999.

Even a strong civil society is limited in such an environment ‘because there is no meaningful institutional separation between a well-organised civil society and a relatively autonomous bureaucratic state’.<sup>10</sup> While politicians are patrons, they must act according to their clients’ concerns, and are therefore both dominant and dominated.<sup>11</sup> Further, as Bayart importantly points out, ‘no matter whether it is united or in disarray, independent or manipulated, massive or tiny, any movement to reduce state power will itself be manipulated by the circumstances of its own politicisation’.<sup>12</sup> In short, these authors argue that one must not assume that Africa can become the democracy that the West can expect or understand,<sup>13</sup> and repeated attempts to make it so are futile.

Of course, such opinions are not without controversy. Clapham finds Bayart’s theories especially out of touch with the realities of modern Africa:

It is a failure of analysis. Intensely geared as it is to the idea of continuity, it is peculiarly ill-adapted to the analysis of change, and indeed may readily lead its adherents to overlook that any significant change is even taking place. It leads to an idealization of clientele systems, and even to a treatment of bribery in terms of the mechanisms of social solidarity, rather than those of elite exploitation.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, one must be careful not to romanticise African culture and to assume that notions of causality and politics are static. Further, one must not simply accept that Africa ‘works’, since its people still need to engage with global structures and discourses. Instead, it might be more helpful to acknowledge the implications this unique political culture might have, and rather than accepting it, base subsequent

<sup>10</sup> Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works*, 17. The ‘reciprocal assimilation of elites’ is when potentially competing social groups fuse together and try to gain control of the state. Bayart, *The State*, 162-163.

<sup>11</sup> Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works*, 25-29.

<sup>12</sup> Jean-Francois Bayart, ‘Civil Society in Africa’ in Chabal, Patrick (ed.), *Political Domination in Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 121.

<sup>13</sup> Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works*, 162-163; Bayart, ‘Civil Society’, 124-125.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Clapham, ‘The “Longue Durée” of the African State’, *African Affairs*, 93:372, 1994, 438.

analyses and recommendations for political and economic development on the realities of how politics ‘works’ in Africa.<sup>15</sup> These debates have a particular relevance in states going through, or recently coming out of a period of conflict and which experience different types of Western interventions that try to help ‘fix’ a country’s problems.

### *3.1.2 Conflict and peace*

During the mid-1990s, nearly a third of Sub-Saharan countries had active civil wars of varying intensity and character. Most of these conflicts have been civil wars, though there are a few examples of interstate warfare (Ethiopia and Eritrea) and proxy wars being fought on behalf of different states (Uganda, Rwanda, Congo). Some of these states have been engaged in bouts of fighting for decades and have yet to reach stable resolutions (Congo, Somalia, Sudan); others gained peace after major changes to borders and governments (Zimbabwe, Zambia); others states have been successful at maintaining relative peace for many years after serious fighting (Nigeria); others have only recently reached resolutions but are showing positive signs of enduring peace (Angola, Mozambique, Cote d’Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone). While an in-depth discussion of the particular nature and causes of civil conflicts in post-colonial Africa is far beyond the reach of this thesis, one fundamental trait of civil wars in Africa that most scholars agree upon needs to be highlighted:

[T]he grievance is not between members of the community... under the ruler, but between members and the ruler or political system as a whole, whose legitimacy the grievants contest... They [these types of civil wars] are the hardest to handle, since neither the conditions of equality favouring

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<sup>15</sup> Christopher Clapham, ‘Governmentality and Economic Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa’, *Third World Quarterly*, 17:4, 1996, 820.

negotiation nor those of hierarchy and community favouring arbitration or commensuration exist.<sup>16</sup>

Because African civil wars are unique in this sense, scholars have begun to reconsider the best ways to deal with such conflicts, not only to explain why they began, and work towards resolving them, but also to maintain peace – a separate debate that will be focused on throughout this thesis.<sup>17</sup> A good starting point is to clarify what ‘peacebuilding’ actually means in the modern context. The definition given by Call and Cousens will be used throughout this thesis:

We adopt a definition of peacebuilding that reflects the trend among scholars of armed conflict, as well as some practitioners, which is: actions undertaken by international or national actors to institutionalize peace, understood as the absence of armed conflict (“negative peace”) and a modicum of participatory politics (a component of “positive peace”) that can be sustained in the absence of an international peace operation.<sup>18</sup>

The best actions for peacebuilding are debatable because ‘no rigorous evidence yet exists on which types of programmes are most effective at overcoming war’s adverse legacies on human capital’; many of the ‘success stories’ or ‘failed attempts’ are merely speculation.<sup>19</sup> Most post-war programmes and initiatives are decided upon by NGOs and governments without significant input from academic groups and individuals who, if acknowledged, might contribute significantly to more effective peacebuilding initiatives.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> William Zartman, (ed.), *Traditional Cures for Modern Conflicts: African Conflict Medicine*, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2000, 9.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Call and Elizabeth Cousens, ‘Ending Wars and Building Peace: International Responses to War-torn Societies’, *International Studies Perspectives*, 9: 1, 2008, 4.

<sup>18</sup> The major approach prior was simply to end the war, however possible, that is, the exclusive pursuit of ‘negative peace’. Taking into account the more complex nature of modern wars, attention is being given to the pursuit of ‘positive peace’: ‘justice, equity and other core social and political goods’. *Ibid*, 3-4.

<sup>19</sup> Chris Blattman and Edward Miguel, ‘Civil War’, National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper 14801, March 2008, 65-66.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 69.

While many academic studies insist that peacebuilding is only possible with major reform of the broader system that created the conditions for war in the first place,<sup>21</sup> a more recent approach to understanding peacebuilding is to examine the specific social factors that contributed to war, taking into account micro-empirical studies that focus on the individuals who fight, why they stopped fighting, and thus how to keep them from fighting again.<sup>22</sup> As Blattman and Miguel write, ‘The social and institutional legacies of conflict are arguably the most important but least understood of war impacts’.<sup>23</sup> They recommend that more data be collected about individuals’ war experiences, something ignored by local governments and international organizations or, if acknowledged, tend to have an unbalanced focus on ex-combatants alone.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Fletcher and Weinstein argue that in determining the best methods for peacebuilding after modern African civil conflicts, attention should be directed towards discovering:

How people can learn to live next to each other without killing their neighbours and what factors will contribute to peaceful coexistence. We aver that reconciliation is likely an individual act that represents a choice made based on one’s ability to forgive or forget. It is not an action that the state or the international community can mandate.<sup>25</sup>

Having outlined the particular nature of African civil wars, we can consider the relative strengths and weaknesses of various forms of transitional justice, which are

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<sup>21</sup> See especially Amos Sawyer, *Beyond Plunder: Toward democratic governance in Liberia*, Boulder: Lynn Rienner, 2005.

<sup>22</sup> See especially Blattman and Miguel, ‘Civil War’, 49-53; For Sierra Leone see Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy M. Weinstein, ‘Who Fights? The Determinants of Participation in Civil War.’ *American Journal of Political Science*, 52:2, 2008; for Rwanda, see Philip Verwimp, ‘Testing the Double-Genocide Thesis for Central and Southern Rwanda’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 47:4, 2003; for Liberia see especially Morten Bøås and Kevin C. Dunn eds., *African Guerrillas: Raging against the Machine*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007.

<sup>23</sup> ‘The unpacking of these complex relationships is perhaps the most pressing area for future empirical research in this area’ in Blattman and Miguel, ‘Civil War’, 66-67.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>25</sup> Laurel E. Fletcher and Harvey M. Weinstein, ‘Violence and Social Repair: Rethinking the Contribution of Justice to Reconciliation’, *Human Rights Quarterly*, 24, 2002, 637.

implemented specifically to enhance positive peace. By examining this wider socio-political context, we will be better able to situate the role of Pentecostalism in Liberia; no study of Liberia is complete without an acute understanding of the issues the country is dealing with after a period of destructive conflict. Further, since we will be using perceptions of peacebuilding as a case study for measuring the socio-political role(s) of Pentecostalism, this background is necessary.

### ***3.2 Transitional Justice***

The major types of transitional justice that have been implemented in post-conflict countries will be briefly reviewed here. More attention will be given to Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, since as of 2010, this is the only form of transitional justice that has been attempted in Liberia.

#### ***3.2.1 International and Domestic Trials***

While international and domestic courts have many differences in jurisdiction, funding and global influence, their general purpose when implemented as a method for transitional justice is retribution, based upon Western-styled justice mechanisms to punish individuals or groups who have broken the law. The International Criminal Court (ICC) is the most recent development in international law to try crimes against humanity, genocide, war crimes and the crime of aggression.<sup>26</sup> It is a permanent court, legally and administratively independent from UN,<sup>27</sup> financed by contributions

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<sup>26</sup> The definition of ‘aggression’ has not been finalised yet, though, and the court cannot indict anybody for that crime until states agree on the conditions.

<sup>27</sup> The UN Security Council has powers to make referrals to the court that would normally not fall under its jurisdiction. Article 13, Article 16.

from state members, and deals with violations that have occurred only after 2002. It is intended to be a ‘last resort’ for situations in which a state has refused to hold a person or group accountable for these crimes, has taken too long to do so, or has requested the ICC to do it (among other reasons, because of a state's financial and logistical limitations). Prior to the ICC, temporary UN Security Council-founded and funded courts, International Criminal Tribunals (ICT), were established to try individuals for war crimes and crimes against humanity; the most well-known are those dealing with Yugoslavia (ICTY) and Rwanda (ICTR), both still ongoing.

It is important to highlight the practical limitations the International Criminal Tribunals. First, they are very expensive and inefficient. Second, the ICC’s jurisdiction covers only post-2002 events. Third, there are thousands of people who have been recommended to this court but whose cases are not accepted to be within the court’s jurisdiction.<sup>28</sup> Because of these limitations, another approach taken is the ad hoc hybrid court<sup>29</sup>, exemplified in Africa by the ongoing Special Court of Sierra Leone.<sup>30</sup> These courts are less expensive, based in their home state (with the exception of the trial of Charles Taylor, being held in a borrowed courtroom in The Hague because of fears his trial would lead to regional instability), and are funded by international bodies and states. In some states, domestic courts have taken the initiative to address war crimes,<sup>31</sup> but generally they deal only with violations of domestic law that occurred during a conflict, for example murder of civilians, rape or

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<sup>28</sup> As of October 2007, the ICC had received 2889 communications about alleged crimes in 139 countries.

<sup>29</sup> There are four such courts: in East Timor, Kosovo, Cambodia and Sierra Leone.

<sup>30</sup> P. Gready, ‘Reconceptualising transitional justice: embedded and distanced justice’, *Conflict, Security and Development*, 5, 2005, 13-14.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 12. See also W. Schabas, ‘Genocide Trials and Gacaca Courts’, *Journal of International Criminal Justice*, 3, 2005, 883; Appleby, *The ambivalence of the sacred*, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000193. Patricia Lundy and Mark McGovern, ‘Whose Justice? Rethinking Transitional Justice from the Bottom Up’, *Journal of Law and Society*, 35:2, 2008, 275-6.

looting, though in many cases such wartime crimes, since it is believed that huge numbers of the population might have taken part in such crimes, are excused.

### 3.2.2 *Traditional Courts*

Given the many limitations of the formal and universal forms of transitional justice described above, there are arguments for a more ‘local’ and ‘culturally relevant’ approach to transitional justice by modelling a mechanism upon existing ‘traditional justice’ and implementing or empowering community-based conflict resolution mechanisms.<sup>32</sup> Generally, these are intended to be used in combination with the formal mechanisms described above for individuals who were major violators of international law. Another reason for supporting traditional justice mechanisms is logistical – they will be able to address far more cases than any formal court will.<sup>33</sup>

Much of the impetus for these forms of justice comes from international entities.<sup>34</sup> The most prominent example of a traditional style of transitional justice is the Rwandan *gacaca* court, which was modelled upon ‘traditional’ Rwandan dispute proceedings that typically had dealt with property matters and only rarely criminal law, and which had mostly fallen into obscurity after European justice models were imported in the 1890s.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> See for example, Adam Smith, *After Genocide: Bringing the Devil to Justice*, 2009, 10.

<sup>33</sup> Gready, ‘Reconceptualizing’, 12.

<sup>34</sup> For example, the USIP summarises that ‘Societies emerging from conflict are culturally diverse. When designing transitional justice mechanisms, it is essential to identify and draw upon local cultural traditions and strengths to the extent possible and to consult the population that the interventions are meant to help’. USIP Report.

<sup>35</sup> Schabas, ‘Genocide’, 888, 891-2.

### 3.2.3 *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission*

Another type of transitional justice mechanism is the truth and reconciliation commission.<sup>36</sup> There has been a notable increase in these being utilised as a supplement to, or total replacement for, criminal trials in post-conflict or post-authoritarian states.<sup>37</sup> TRCs, despite their wide variety in application and socio-political outcomes, can be generally defined as ‘bodies set up to investigate a past history of violations of human rights in a particular country – which can include violations by the military or other government forces or armed opposition groups’.<sup>38</sup> They are often set up as a part of a peace agreement<sup>39</sup> or in response to demands of human rights civil society groups,<sup>40</sup> and are generally funded by donor countries and the UN.<sup>41</sup>

The main reason a state may support a TRC instead of some form of retributive justice is that, as Desmond Tutu said of the South African TRC: ‘[retributive justice] has a number of shortcomings... Trials are backward looking rather than promoting social renewal’.<sup>42</sup> By comparison, retributive trials might reignite tensions without effectively dealing with the trauma and anger that comes with publicly revisiting such

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<sup>36</sup> These are slightly different than Truth Commissions, which were established earlier and had the specific purpose of creating a narrative of events to expose systematic abuses during a specific period. TRCs were developed so that more focus was placed on using these commissions to bring about reconciliation between grieving parties.

<sup>37</sup> By the end of the 1980s there were only six truth commissions; through the 1990s there were fourteen and they continue to be a popular option for states dealing with a period of violence.

<sup>38</sup> Priscilla Hayner, ‘Fifteen Truth Commissions: 1974 to 1994: A Comparative Study’, *Human Rights Quarterly*, 16, 1994, 558. Teitel provides the best background of truth commissions’ genealogies, R.G. Teitel, ‘Transitional Justice Genealogy’, *Harvard Human Rights Journal*, 16, 2003, 10.

<sup>39</sup> This was how Liberia’s and Sierra Leone’s was established.

<sup>40</sup> For example, in Kenya and South Africa.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Kofi Annan, in his report to the Security Council in August 2004, acknowledged that there has been an increased focus by the United Nations on questions of justice, transitional justice, and the rule of law in conflict and post-conflict societies’. Lundy and McGovern, ‘Rethinking’, 269.

<sup>42</sup> Tutu 1999, cited in Eric Brahm, ‘Uncovering the Truth: Examining Truth Commission Success and Impact’, *International Studies Perspectives*, 8, 2007, 18.

events. TRCs will also be better at exposing society's collective guilt in the violence, as opposed to devoting resources to convicting just a handful of the 'worst perpetrators'.

Another major reason for supporting TRCs is that both trials and traditional community-based mechanisms are thought to be ineffective at dealing with the systematic violence or deeper tensions that occurred long ago and/or require collective memory to be effectively dealt with. Truth commissions, both flexible enough to deal with local concerns, but large enough to address national concerns legitimately, will be able to elucidate underlying causes of conflict, and thus 'be better able than trials to facilitate needed political and cultural change'.<sup>43</sup>

### ***3.3 Thematic debates about peacebuilding***

Of course, any type of transitional justice mechanism has the overall goal of promoting positive peace. However, these three varieties of transitional justice mechanisms – international courts, traditional justice and TRCs – are very different. More than that, even the same type of justice mechanism will have very different manifestations depending on the context in which it is implemented. Generally, a justice mechanism will focus on one of three specific goals that it sees most important for peacebuilding in that specific context: either to end impunity, to promote national reconciliation and social repair, or to promote reconciliation and trauma-healing of individuals and communities. The literature dealing with the relative strengths and weaknesses of transitional justice mechanisms is thus not only considering a

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<sup>43</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism and the Genocide in Rwanda*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002, 272-3.

mechanism's success in achieving its stated goal, but is also considering how constructive its goal is in the first place for effective peacebuilding. Below, the debates surrounding TRCs in relation to each of these goals will be outlined.

### *3.3.1 Retribution, rule of law, ending impunity*

Supporters of retributive trials argue that these are effective in demonstrating that egregious human rights violations will not go unpunished, setting a precedent and thus discouraging others. Yet in many of these conflicts, there is an unclear line between who are the victims and who are the perpetrators; further, it might be that tens of thousands of citizens might be considered guilty and deserving of punishment. In such situations, and especially because courts have limited funding and time, only those who are considered to be the 'key' players are put on trial. Supporters of these moves will argue these few trials are critical steps towards ending impunity and upholding the rule of law. Sometimes traditional retributive courts are implemented to enable communities to address impunity on a smaller scale and will have their own form of punishment that they feel is more culturally relevant, and far more practical in terms of dealing with financial and time constraints.

Critics of TRCs will often argue that because they prioritise reconciliation over rule of law, they are ineffective at ending impunity and upholding the rule of law. Such criticisms are especially strong when dealing with situations in which amnesty is granted to perpetrators in exchange for public truth-telling, rather than dispensing formal punishment and retribution according to the law.<sup>44</sup> In response to such

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<sup>44</sup> As Teitel writes, 'Transitional justice became a form of dialogue between victims and their perpetrators.' Teitel, 'Genealogy', 80-81.

criticism, though, supporters of TRCs point out that in every society, perceptions of justice are different. Therefore the public display of truth-telling and remorse can be a more ‘culturally relevant’ type of justice served on the perpetrator, and a more meaningful type of justice as perceived by the victims.<sup>45</sup> Such debates are far from resolved within Africa. In the conferences regarding how best to deal with post-genocide Rwanda, for example, the South Africans were strongly in support of a TRC because, as they said, forgiveness, repentance and thus amnesty was a more ‘African’ way of addressing accountability for past actions.<sup>46</sup> Blanket amnesties, however, were strongly opposed by Rwandans and most donor organisations. Some TRCs have mandates to recommend prosecution as well as amnesty; while prosecution is often viewed as a good step towards ending impunity, the recommendations are often never carried out.<sup>47</sup>

Most critics of TRCs, however, see ending impunity to be totally dependent on the rule of law, and therefore TRCs are seen as nothing more than weak justice that consolidates impunity and do little to discourage perpetrators from committing more atrocities, since their ability to get off without punishment has been clearly proven. Further, critics point out, even if it is assumed that public truth telling and highlighting abuses helps end impunity and thus encourage peacebuilding, one must question a TRC’s ability to do even that.

Supporters of TRCs argue that they are more effective than retributive trials in addressing impunity because confessions can be elicited on a much larger scale to highlight systematic abuses and expose more of the guilty; merely convicting a

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<sup>45</sup> Brahm, ‘Uncovering’, 21.

<sup>46</sup> Schabas, ‘Genocide’, 884.

<sup>47</sup> Priscilla Hayner, ‘Commissioning the Truth: Further Research Questions’, *Third World Quarterly*, 17, 1996. See also Fletcher and Weinstein, ‘Rethinking’, 630.

‘scapegoat’, as trials do, does nothing to address a society’s collective guilt,<sup>48</sup> including lesser perpetrators and their supporters.<sup>49</sup> Supporters of TRCs also prefer them to traditional courts because TRCs are formal enough to be held accountable to the international community, while being flexible enough to remain culturally relevant to the population. Co-opting traditional courts, by contrast, might merely be consolidating the unequal power relationships.<sup>50</sup> Further, these courts are unable to elucidate the ‘root causes’ of conflict,<sup>51</sup> lack legitimacy because of their lack of oversight,<sup>52</sup> or are perceived as unnecessary impositions on local populations.

Still, critics point out that even truth commissions might contain very little actual truth. It is often the case that many of the perpetrators who participate in the proceedings will lie or make false apologies only because they are seeking amnesty. This may only further legitimise systematic abuses of governments or brutal tactics of warlords in the future.<sup>53</sup> It has also been noted how perpetrators tend to avoid the proceedings altogether and publicly state that they are illegitimate. In some cases, government or business might have control over TRC and be able to easily interfere, especially if these governments or businesses will be somehow implicated; consequently, certain truths will never be revealed.<sup>54</sup> Still, even if testimonies are uncensored, genuine and truthful, some have noted that there is a natural shifting of blame, among both victims and perpetrators, which cannot address impunity in the

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<sup>48</sup> Fletcher and Weinstein, ‘Rethinking’, 580-1.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 581. See also Gready, ‘Reconceptualizing’, 6-7.

<sup>50</sup> Lundy and McGovern, ‘Rethinking’, 272-3. See also ‘“There’s no bad bush to throw away a bad child”: “tradition” inspired reintegration in post-war Sierra Leone’, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 46:2, 2008, 306; Gready, ‘Reconceptualizing’, 12-13; Schabas, ‘Genocide’, 896.

<sup>51</sup> Fletcher and Weinstein, ‘Rethinking’, 632-3.

<sup>52</sup> Steven Archibald and Paul Richards, ‘Conversion to Human Rights? Popular debate about war and justice in rural Central Sierra Leone’, *Africa*, 72, 2002, 344.

<sup>53</sup> Patrick Ball and Audrey R Chapman, “The Truth of Truth Commissions: Comparative Lessons from Haiti, South Africa, and Guatemala.” *Human Rights Quarterly*, 23:1, 34.

<sup>54</sup> Appleby, *Ambivalence*, 193.

way retribution can.<sup>55</sup> In some cases, there is a ‘wilful ignorance’ among the entire population about certain truths. A TRC might also not devote sufficient attention to ‘systematic economic abuses and legacies as it too privileged a narrow civil and political focus. The result has been entrenched, even increasing, inequality and poverty’.<sup>56</sup>

TRCs are also criticised because they can lack legitimacy among the people. Thus, even if international observers and local governments and leaders consider the process a success, the narrative produced can still be perceived by the majority of the population as somehow incomplete<sup>57</sup>, corrupted by the government or business, or simply irrelevant in terms of holding people accountable for their actions.

### *3.3.2 Social repair – National Reconciliation*

A more common reason given in support of TRCs is that they prioritise national healing and reconciliation that, in certain societies, is an important first step for effective peacebuilding. By creating a national history of events, it is thought, a TRC will be able to elucidate the root causes of the conflict so that steps can be taken to correct the problem, ultimately benefiting the nation in both the long and short-term. A focus on national reconciliation will prioritise stability over rule of law, and even if the full ‘truth’ behind events is not revealed, and certain major players are never exposed, as long as society has been reconciled, the TRC will be considered a

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<sup>55</sup> Kelsall finds the tendency for statement-givers to apologise for their actions, but somehow attribute their behaviour to something else. Tim Kelsall, Truth, Lies, Ritual: Preliminary Reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone’, *Human Rights Quarterly*, 27: 2, 2005, 372-3.

<sup>56</sup> Gready, ‘Reconceptualizing’, 5.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 5.

success.<sup>58</sup> A TRC, in contrast to a formal court, will be able to address these sensitive issues in a flexible way to avoid reigniting conflict.

Some have argued that implementing programmes intended to promote reconciliation on a large scale, and based upon what the TRC considers appropriate, might be detrimental if bringing up the past again will reignite tensions before people are ready to forgive.<sup>59</sup> Other critics argue that prioritising national reconciliation based upon a single narrative is detrimental to the individuals who surely have not experienced events in exactly the same way as a truth commission has recorded in the ‘official version’.<sup>60</sup> Still others point out that the first step of creating a national history will lead to the secondary effects of enabling individual reconciliation through its ‘useful framework in which new rituals or spaces can be provided for the enactment of closure... Facts need a narrative framework in order to be rendered meaningful and take their place in a shared account of the past’.<sup>61</sup> Again, it must be considered that even if national reconciliation should be prioritised at the expense of rule of law, to what extent is a TRC effective in achieving this goal?

A major reason given by supporters of TRCs for their being more effective at achieving national reconciliation is that they are based locally. International courts conduct their proceedings in other countries, using foreign staff and most of the issues being dealt with are beyond the immediate concerns of the people.<sup>62</sup> Even when

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<sup>58</sup> Chapman and Ball, ‘Comparitive’, 34

<sup>59</sup> Shreiter discussed in Appleby, *Ambivalence*, 201-3.

<sup>60</sup> Brandon Hamber and Richard Wilson, ‘Symbolic closure through memory. Reparation and revenge in post-conflict societies’, *Journal of Human Rights*, 1:1, 2002, 35-6.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 68-69.

<sup>62</sup> This has been a criticism as the ICTR, as Gready writes: ‘The ICTR is an example of international justice by and for the international community...an act of “symbolic politics”... For the Rwandan population, the Court is largely unknown and irrelevant’. Gready, ‘Reconceptualizing’, 11.

these trials are held locally, as in hybrid courts, they are not necessarily supported by the public because they are still too ‘distant’ in their concerns.

Many scholars have pointed out how community-based approaches to national reconciliation are more effective, especially if they are culturally-specific.<sup>63</sup> Sawyer has been vocal about the need for communities to be involved as ‘co providers and co-producers’ in such peacebuilding activities.<sup>64</sup> Because TRCs are more adaptable to local contexts, and involve local actors, they are supported over formal courts in pursuing this goal. TRCs are also, as described above, more able to expose the systematic abuses that have contributed to conflict and will be able to make more informed recommendations to correct these for the sake of national repair. However, as discussed above, this depends on whether or not the TRC has a comprehensive account, and to what extent the public considers the TRC’s work to be legitimate.

Supporters of TRCs also consider them to be better for national reconciliation because of their sensitivity to the victims, and groups of people who might still be affected by war-stories. By contrast, trials bring up the past in a ‘cold’ fashion, focusing only on the perpetrator, the story, while ignoring the possibility that the telling of that story can elicit impassioned responses from those following the trial,<sup>65</sup> and the victim who is giving testimony. Such insensitivity could reignite tensions that would be, in the short term, detrimental for an enduring but fragile peace. That said, the same complaint has been made about TRCs that bring sensitive subjects into the

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<sup>63</sup> See for example, Daly, ‘Truth’ 387.

<sup>64</sup> Sawyer, *Beyond*, 137-8; see also 66.

<sup>65</sup> Brahm, ‘Uncovering’, 19-20.

open, in some cases making them more public than distant trials, which may also ‘open old wounds’ among groups of people, instead of healing them.<sup>66</sup>

Another criticism of trials’ ability to promote national reconciliation is that rebels are discouraged from laying down their arms and signing peace agreements because of their fear that despite their cooperation, they will later be indicted. There is also a fear that after a period of peace, if a formal rebel leader feels threatened with punishment, conflict may erupt again. TRCs, in contrast, often have a mandate to grant amnesty in return for truth-telling and legitimate repentance. This not only encourages rebel leaders to come forward and apologise, but also encourages them to maintain the peace because they have nothing to fear.

### *3.3.3 Personal reconciliation*

Supporters of TRCs consider them good for personal reconciliation because of the attention they give to the individual victims of atrocities, and their encouragement for people and communities to reconcile with one another. Unless this occurs, a country cannot effectively ‘move on’ and recover as a whole. Supporters of retributive trials, on the other hand, argue that trials will help enable victims to ‘move on’ because they will feel that justice has been served, thereby helping them to recover from trauma.

One of the most common arguments in support of TRCs in terms of their ability to help individuals is that by providing a venue in which victims can tell their story, a victim experiences ‘cathartic release’ which will, in turn, enable his or her healing and ‘moving forward’.<sup>67</sup> For these individuals, the argument goes, being able to tell

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<sup>66</sup> Lundy and McGovern, ‘Rethinking’, 271.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 270; See also Hamber and Wilson, ‘Symbolic’, 48-50.

their story lets them be confident that their suffering was legitimate, and that they deserve the respect of an audience to hear it: ‘The idea that public acknowledgement of suffering – the truth about injustice – will begin to restore victims’ dignity is perhaps the central premise on which truth commissions are founded’.<sup>68</sup>

While this catharsis may be the case for some, some critics of TRCs give examples of victims who are apparently totally detached from the story they are telling, or that the telling of the story actually re-traumatises them. Further, many victims have been shown to be unaware or confused about the TRC process, and have taken part only because they thought they would get something in return. When it becomes clear that they get nothing out of it, there is little personal healing to be noticed. Further, even if a person does not give a testimony, having to hear about atrocities committed, maybe ones that occurred to a friend or family member, can be traumatising as well.

Acknowledging that a TRC is not able to help everybody, supporters argue that it will at least provide a flexible venue in which some people may come forward, and use it as they want. Perhaps it was not used as it was intended, but if the victim gained something from it, then it did its job. With this thinking, it is less the substance of a TRC, and more the *ritual* that goes on that provides meaning to those who take part.<sup>69</sup>

This brief outline of the relative strengths and weaknesses of TRCs in relation to other transitional justice mechanisms has revealed the variety of debates about priorities for peacebuilding and the best ways to achieve those priorities. What all

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<sup>68</sup> Chapman and Ball, ‘Comparitive’, 12.

<sup>69</sup> Hamber and Wilson ‘Symbolic’, 68–69. See also Tim Kelsall, *Culture under cross-examination. International Justice and the Special Court for Sierra Leone*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

these mechanisms have in common is that they are each, to various extents, imposed upon people for the specific purpose of helping them, empowering them, or coercing them, to consolidate peace. Many have pointed out how peacebuilding, including increased promotion of human rights,<sup>70</sup> rule of law and ‘promoting justice’ have become substantially – in some cases entirely – donor-driven.<sup>71</sup> Some have even referred to the ‘judicialisation of international relations’.<sup>72</sup> The literature often identifies two major problems with this increased attention. The first is mostly logistical – all these programmes tend to be inefficient because the lack of communication and because each has its own goals, quotas to meet, and sources of funding with disparate agendas.<sup>73</sup> The second is more theoretical – these programmes, by virtue of their being externally imposed, often with some element of Western bias, might have fundamental limitations in truly helping a community. This second problem will now be considered since a major question that is dealt with in this thesis is to what extent religion might play a powerful role in peacebuilding, especially as compared to the secular initiatives described above.

### *3.3.4 Unintended consequences*

The scholars that we have examined above are in disagreement about the *type* of transitional justice mechanism that should be implemented in post-conflict states.

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<sup>70</sup> See especially Ellis and ter Haar, *World*, 148; Hayner, ‘Fifteen’, 609; Archibald and Richards, ‘Conversion’, 339.

<sup>71</sup> Schabas has suggested that the ICTR would never have been established had the ICTY experiment not been going on prior to the genocide. Schabas, ‘Genocide’, 880. Uvin has called Rwanda a ‘laboratory for the new post-conflict agenda that donors are beginning to implement’; in the promotion of justice, donors funded more than 100 justice-related projects which cost more than \$100 million. P. Uvin, ‘Difficult Choices in the New Post-Conflict Agenda: the International Community in Rwanda After the Genocide’, *Third World Quarterly*, 22, 2001, 182-4.

<sup>72</sup> Lundy and McGovern, ‘Rethinking’, 275-6.

<sup>73</sup> Uvin, ‘Difficult’, 183.

There are other scholars, however, who do not see these transitional justice mechanisms as the critical components of post-conflict peacebuilding. Instead, they focus on how peacebuilding might occur as an unintended consequence. This approach begins with the argument that a society's demands for justice, reconciliation and respect for others as humans can occur without Western pressure, initiatives or local empowerment. Rather, these ideals can arise naturally, or can arise as unintended consequences of local circumstances.<sup>74</sup> External interventions are therefore viewed as inefficient at best, and in some cases, impeding what would have been a natural and purely local strategy towards consolidating peace.

Archibald and Richards demonstrate this in post-conflict Sierra Leone with respect to the development of local respect and demands for human rights. They argue that 'hitherto silent populations of youth and women seem to be engaged in a process better characterized as the invention of human rights from below', primarily because the 'changes in social circumstances triggered by war and resettlement have reshaped local debate about rights and justice'.<sup>75</sup> In this case, whatever side of the conflict people had been involved in, they tended to agree about the reasons for the war – poverty and injustice, especially affecting the youth – and that in order to avoid conflict in the future, the previous way of doing things needed to be changed. For these people, a major change needed was an increased respect for individuals' rights.<sup>76</sup> For the youth, the desire to assert their views that the patrimonial system had

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<sup>74</sup> Of course, there are still Western influences involved, but the point is that these influences are not imposed for the sake of achieving these ideals.

<sup>75</sup> Archibald and Richards, 'Conversion', 340-1.

<sup>76</sup> The authors argue that this is 'the window for human rights'. *Ibid*, 344-7. See also Ellis and ter Haar, *Worlds*, 84.

failed them, and that something needed to be changed so that they do not have to resort to violence to try to assert their ‘rights’.

This evidence indicates that these supposed ‘Western’ ideals of human rights do not require external pressures to appear in African contexts.<sup>77</sup> Acknowledging examples like this, the question becomes not how best to intervene in the affairs of a post-conflict state, but rather, whether there should be interventions at all. An increasing number of scholars and observers of Western interventions are beginning to acknowledge that the Western way of pursuing these needs to be seriously reconsidered.<sup>78</sup> Instead, more studies should be conducted to elucidate the ways that ideals that affect peacebuilding and democracy are generated from *within*, and what the social and political factors are that have contributed to the generation of these ideals. It might be that religion, as an unintended consequence, can help to generate these ideals. This possibility will be explored throughout the thesis with respect to Pentecostalism in Liberia.

### **3.4 Discussion**

#### **3.4.1 The West vs. ‘local’**

Many aspects of the debates outlined in this chapter stem from a fundamental disagreement about what types of democratising and peacebuilding activities are most appropriate for Africa: universalistic Western interventions, culturally specific (but

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<sup>77</sup> See also Mariane Ferme and Danny Hoffman, ‘Hunter Militias and the International Human Rights Discourse in Sierra Leone and Beyond’, *Africa Today*, 50: 4, 2004, 79.

<sup>78</sup> The conundrum ultimately is one common to a range of other fields; how to combine the potentially laudable ends of a global human rights culture without the means of their introduction acting as the negation of those very rights. Lundy and McGovern, ‘Rethinking’, 291-2. See also Ellis and ter Haar, *Worlds*, 148.

usually manipulated or co-opted by Western entities) or purely local.<sup>79</sup> Critics of the first two types argue that their invariable Western bias makes them too universalistic in application and are thus ineffective or totally irrelevant in other settings. Most basically, such initiatives make incorrect assumptions that ideas of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ are the same across cultures.<sup>80</sup> For example, Wiredu writes, ‘[In Africa] Moral rightness or wrongness... is understood in terms of human interests... A moral rule is articulated on the basis of its ability to meet human needs in the communal setting’.<sup>81</sup>

Taking differences like that very seriously, some scholars suggest that this ‘African worldview’ is totally opposed to Western ideas of development, progress and democracy, and one should take try to first understand this unique worldview before assessing such interventions. This argument is most clearly laid out by Chabal and Daloz who suggest that since this worldview is so different, then perhaps the West should stop trying to change it and instead, try to understand and work with it.

Much of the recent scholarship supports at least trying to understand local approaches that achieve the desired result: peace. Thus, it is sometimes argued that the best way to help Africa is to empower the local institutions that already exist and work according to their worldview, however counterproductive or even ‘irrational’ it may seem to Western observers. Local mechanisms can be embraced or

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<sup>79</sup> Uvin, ‘Difficult’, 186.

<sup>80</sup> ‘In spite of the almost universal condemnation of the civilising mission, the imposition of discipline on Africans continues today much as before. World Bank experts calling on them to adopt the virtues of ‘good governance’ and offering them financial incentives, ecologists telling them to conserve the environment, feminists scandalised by female genital cutting, and humanitarians moved by the cruelty of war: all of these, however sincere or commendable their cause, seek to impose on Africans a particular view of what is right and wrong’. Ellis and ter Haar, *Worlds*, 148.

<sup>81</sup> Wiredu in Ellis & ter Haar, *Worlds*, 142. Ellis and ter Haar similarly write, ‘In general it is helpful to think of pre-colonial African societies as having been ruled by justice rather than by law. Justice is a moral concept; law has become a bureaucratic one’. Ellis and ter Haar, *Worlds*, 146.

encouraged<sup>82</sup> in order to enhance peace and therefore avoid the massive waste of time and resources devoted to such objectives by UN administrators, governments and NGOs who, as Ellis puts it, fail to notice the ‘alternative structures already in existence right under their noses. Administrators should learn to take advantage of such indigenous political institutions.’<sup>83</sup>

However, it is often the case that these local systems, rather than being used in their ‘traditional’ way or with full acceptance or understanding of their distinct worldview, are invariably manipulated or co-opted by Western agencies. Often this cultural sensitivity goes so far as only being ‘aware’ of these ‘cultural differences’,<sup>84</sup> but at the same time recommending a long list of their own (Western) recommendations.<sup>85</sup> Such interventions might also be uncritically accepting ‘traditions’ that are not traditions at all,<sup>86</sup> or are widely viewed with as much suspicion as other aspects of the formal justice system.<sup>87</sup> This is not to say that such suggestions are incorrect, but to highlight the fact that even as local approaches are being considered, their implementations ultimately have a Western bias. Harry West has given an example of how the co-option of traditional leaders by international organisations and the government, for the purposes of providing more ‘culturally relevant’ healing for traumatised individuals, was inherently flawed *because of* this co-option.<sup>88</sup> He argues that this demonstrates even further that whatever is being

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<sup>82</sup> See also for example, Smith, *After Genocide*, 10.

<sup>83</sup> Stephen Ellis, ‘How to Rebuild Africa’, *Foreign Affairs*, Sept/Oct 2005, 148. See also Ellis, ‘Young soldiers’, 8.

<sup>84</sup> Judy Barsalou, ‘Trauma and Transitional Justice in Divided Societies’, United States Institute for Peace Special Report, April 2005, 8.

<sup>85</sup> Barsalou, ‘Trauma’, 1

<sup>86</sup> Ellis and ter Haar, *Worlds*, 144-5; see also Stephen Ellis, ‘Young soldiers’, 4-5.

<sup>87</sup> Archibald and Richards, ‘Conversion’, 344.

<sup>88</sup> See for example Daly, who argues that ‘community determination on the terms on which forgiveness should be granted is more likely to lead to rebuilding’. Erin Daly, ‘Truth Skepticism: An

implemented in certain contexts must never be assumed to be understood in the way the government intended.<sup>89</sup> Rather than being something good, he shows, it might be considered something dangerous.

Despite all of these important arguments that encourage observers to look more closely at locally-based strategies towards peacebuilding, the existing work widely overlooks or misinterprets religious groups' actual or potential involvement in all this.<sup>90</sup> While some will pay attention to the religious institution, usually the mainline organisations and their partnering NGOs, very few look at the possible implications of what seem to be spiritualised ideas and actions that, they assume, can have no other role than distracting people from what is *really* happening, in a secular sense. We will be examining this issue directly throughout this thesis in terms of the Pentecostal churches' unintentionally succeeding at achieving 'positive peace'. First, an overview of the current socio-political climate and peacebuilding initiatives in Liberia will help us situate the study of the Pentecostal churches' socio-political role in the country.

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Inquiry Into the Value of Truth in Times of Transition', *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 2, 2008387. Harry West writes, 'Western donors also played a substantial role in the production of public discourse of traditional authority and traditional healing. Donor interest in these entities was bound up with the neo-liberal project of "democratic decentralization"... during the war, they suggested, traditional healers had effectively filled in where the state system had collapsed, often providing more culturally appropriate treatment for war-related trauma than "modern" health care workers might have.' Harry West, *Kupilikula: Governance and the Invisible Realm in Mozambique*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, 202-3.

<sup>89</sup> See also Ferme and Hoffman: 'In short, the networks of information – the international media, representatives of the UN, NGOs operating in the region – which conveyed a language of rights that became a part of the discourse of combatants simultaneously ensured that this discourse would be applied only selectively, and often in ways antithetical to the purported mission of those same organizations', in 'Hunter Militias', 74, 89.

<sup>90</sup> Ellis and ter Haar insist that the people's resources that will help encourage development are 'not limited to material and intellectual resources, but also people's religious or spiritual resources', in 'The Role of Religion in Development: Towards a New Relationship between the European Union and Africa', *European Journal of Development Research*; 18:3, 2006, 362.

### **3.5 Liberia - Social and political background**

#### **3.5.1 History**

The area which is now Liberia was settled in 1822 by freed American slaves under the aegis of the pseudo-humanitarian American Colonization Society(ACS).<sup>91</sup> The sovereign state of Liberia was established in 1847 by these settlers, who later established the True Whig Party (TWP) that ruled from 1858 to 1980.<sup>92</sup> These settlers, known as Americo-Liberians, were never more than 5% of the population yet effectively ran the state with little to no participation from indigenous Liberians, and largely for their personal benefit.<sup>93</sup> By 1980, despite then-President Tolbert's attempts to further incorporate indigenous Liberians into politics, corruption and inefficiency had left the state without a channel through which non-Americo-Liberian political views and organizations could be effectively incorporated into government.<sup>94</sup> This political situation created an environment in which it seemed that only force could overcome True Whig political hegemony. On 12 April 1980 Master-Sergeant Samuel K. Doe staged a bloody coup with sixteen other low-ranking soldiers and became the first indigenous leader of Liberia, with the exuberant support of indigenous Liberians who had a new hope for their country.

Within weeks of taking leadership Doe killed or dismissed most senior officers in the military, had hundreds of civilians associated with the TWP arrested and tortured,

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<sup>91</sup> Although the explanation given by the ACS for repatriation of African slaves was that the freed slaves would benefit, another key reason is probably that the US simply wanted a way to get rid of black freedmen as the institution of slavery was becoming more controversial. J. Levitt, *The Evolution of Deadly Conflict in Liberia*, Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2005, 31-33.

<sup>92</sup> Ellis, *The Mask*, 41.

<sup>93</sup> By 1865 when colonization stopped, there were only about 12,000 settlers in Liberia in total. Of these 4,500 were freeborn, 7,000 born in slavery, 5,700 freed from transport ships that never made it to the US (known as Congoes), S. Hale cited in Gifford, *Christianity and Politics*, 9-10.

<sup>94</sup> Christopher Clapham, 'Liberia', in Donal Cruise O'Brien, John Dunn and Richard Rathbone (eds.), *Contemporary West African States*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, 99-111.

and killed thirteen prominent members from the old regime. The PRC imposed a ban on political activities, censored the media, and resorted to killing, looting, cheating and bullying any suspected opponents in order to cow dissent. By 1984, relations between the civilian and military groups were severely fragmented, and the initial popular support and legitimacy of Doe and his PRC had disappeared.<sup>95</sup> When increasing pressure from America to return to civilian rule became evident, elections were held in 1985 and after getting 50.9% of the vote in the flagrantly rigged elections, Doe declared himself President to the approval of US President Reagan, who sent him a congratulatory telegram.<sup>96</sup> From then on, Doe's destructive leadership was largely for personal gain, not to fulfill the promises he made to Liberia after his coup.

### 3.5.2 *The wars*

At the end of 1989, future warlord Charles Taylor and his NPFL, made up of Liberians who had fled to Cote d'Ivoire and were united by a common hatred of Doe (and any Mandingos or Krahns, who were the main beneficiaries of Doe's regime), invaded the country.<sup>97</sup> The conflict developed into a civil war and Doe was killed by (now Senator) Prince Johnson at the end of 1990 having maintained power only over his palace and a small section of Monrovia.<sup>98</sup> 'Greater Liberia' was, at its peak in 1992, made up of most of Liberia, parts of Guinea and about a quarter of Sierra Leone. Taylor's territory was acquired without recourse to bureaucratic

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 103-5

<sup>96</sup> Gifford, *Christianity and Politics*, 235.

<sup>97</sup> Stephen Ellis, 'Liberia 1989-1994: A Study of Ethnic and Spiritual Violence', *African Affairs*, 94: 375, 1995, 165-97.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 167.

institutionalization of his rule, and had its own banking system, currency, television and radio network, airfields and an export trade in diamonds, timber, gold and agricultural products.<sup>99</sup> By 1996, a huge number of military factions had appeared, many of which organized with respect to ethnicity, although only about seven were ever very strong, whose main intentions were to occupy territory so that it could utilize resources much like Taylor did.<sup>100</sup> Throughout the war, repeated attempts were made to restore peace in Liberia, but one warlord or another would either refuse to agree to a deal, or agree, sign papers, and then ignore it altogether.<sup>101</sup>

In August 1996, the fourteenth peace accord was signed and most of the fighting stopped. In 1997, Charles Taylor and his NPP won presidential and parliamentary elections with 75% of the vote (80% of the eligible population voted), probably because the people saw little hope for lasting peace unless Taylor was elected.<sup>102</sup> Although the fighting had stopped, the security situation was still precarious. In 1998 after an armed clash outside of Monrovia, Taylor imprisoned a number of ULIMO-J supporters and other opponents, and declared himself no longer committed to the conditions of the peace accord. In 2000 a new group of rebels, the Liberians United for Reconstruction and Democracy (LURD), gained control of much of northern Liberia. By 2003 another rebel group, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) had taken over most of the country except Monrovia. By then the UN had imposed sanctions on trade of diamonds, timber and weapons because of Taylor's

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<sup>99</sup> W. Reno, 'Reinvention of an African Patrimonial State: Charles Taylor's Liberia' *Third World Quarterly*, 16:1, 1995, 112-113.

<sup>100</sup> Ellis, *The Mask*, 104-105.

<sup>101</sup> M.A. Sesay, 'Politics and Society in Post-War Liberia', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 24:3, 1996, 397-405.

<sup>102</sup> Ellis, *The Mask*, 109-110. See also D. Harris, 'From "Warlord" to "Democratic" President: How Charles Taylor Won the 1997 Liberian Elections', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 37:3, 1999, 431-432.

continued support of the RUF in Sierra Leone.<sup>103</sup> In the midst of peace negotiations in Ghana in 2003, the UN announced that Taylor was to be indicted for war crimes.

In June of 2003 and LURD attacked Monrovia, resulting in thousands of civilian deaths. Nigerian peacekeepers arrived and Taylor was convinced to step down from the presidency and left for exile in Nigeria in August.<sup>104</sup> The peace process continued in Ghana, with Taylor fortunately out of the picture, with representation from warring factions, political parties and civil society organizations. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in August 2003 and an interim government was established by October, made up of members of various warring factions and political parties. By the end of the year the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) was established and had begun deploying over 15,000 peacekeepers to the country who disarmed and demobilized over 100,000 ex-combatants by September 2004.<sup>105</sup>

After largely peaceful, legitimate and free-and-fair elections in 2005, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf became Liberia's new president and the first elected African female head of state. With the help of UNMIL and many INGOs and NGOs, and Johnson-Johnson-Sirleaf's ambitious anti-corruption and development projects, Liberia is undergoing a critical and difficult period of total economic, political, infrastructural and social reconstruction.

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<sup>103</sup> D. Nilsson and M.S. Kovacs, 'Breaking the Cycle of Violence? Promises and Pitfalls of the Liberian Peace Process', *Civil Wars*, 7:4, 2005, 399-400.

<sup>104</sup> M. Moran and M. Pitcher, 'The "basket case" and the "poster child": explaining the end of civil conflicts in Liberia and Mozambique', *Third World Quarterly*, 25:3, 2004, 506.

<sup>105</sup> This resulted in the collection of 27,000 weapons, most of them small arms, strongly indicating that there are still armed individuals, arms caches, or export of weapons to other countries. Nilsson and Kovacs, 'Breaking', 405. The World Bank reports only 70,000 ex-combatants were disarmed by this time. P. Richards et. al., 'Community Cohesion in Liberia. A Post-War Rapid Social Assessment' In *Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction*, The World Bank and Reconstruction/Social Development Department Paper No. 21. Washington, DC, January 2005, 2.

### *3.5.3 The Damage*

The facts and figures show clearly the destruction and devastation that Liberia finds itself in today. It is estimated that 270,000 people died during the war and at least one million were displaced; 63.8% of Liberians live below the poverty line; 48% of Liberians live in extreme poverty; 73% of the poor live in rural areas.<sup>106</sup> Between 1987 and 1995, GDP fell 90% and external debt was \$3.7 billion. Average income is one-sixth of its level in 1979 and one-quarter of its level in 1987.<sup>107</sup> Formal unemployment is 80%.<sup>108</sup> Between 1987 and 2005, rice production fell 76%, financial services fell 93%, and electricity and water fell 85%.<sup>109</sup> Transportation and communication, trade and hotels, and construction all fell around 69%. There are an estimated 250,000 refugees and 350,000 internally displaced persons still need to be resettled.<sup>110</sup> The demands on Monrovia are massive as well, not least because of the huge influx of people from the countryside during the war, estimated to have increased from 300,000 in 1989 to more than 1.3 million by 2003.<sup>111</sup> Illiteracy is at least 55% and over half of Liberian children aged 6-11 are estimated to be out of school.<sup>112</sup> The judicial system is in disarray and there is a widespread climate of impunity and lawlessness.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Government of Liberia (GOL), Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), p. 25.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>108</sup> GOL, Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy (iPRS), 2006, xiii.

<sup>109</sup> GOL, PRS, 2008, pp. 15-16

<sup>110</sup> GOL, iPRS, p. 13.

<sup>111</sup> E. Pajibo, ‘Traditional Justice Mechanisms, the Liberian Case’, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Stockholm, 2008, p. 10. The latest census published preliminary results which confirmed the population of Liberia to be 3.49 million, and the population of Montserrado County (where Monrovia is located) to be 1.14 million. Government of Liberia, ‘2008 Population and National Housing Census Provisional Results’, LISGIS, June 2008.

<sup>112</sup> GOL, PRS, pp. 31-32.

<sup>113</sup> See International Crisis Group, ‘Liberia: Resurrecting the Justice System’, Africa Report #10, April 2006, 1-2.

Nonetheless, the situation is slowly improving. Economic growth reached 5.3% in 2005, 7.8% in 2006 and 9.4% in 2007; the World Bank has cancelled Liberia's massive debt arrears. Social services are becoming more available, roads are being repaired, schools are being refurbished, businesses are opening and refugees are returning to their homes.<sup>114</sup> According to the World Bank, Liberia in 2007 had the largest improvement in the world for 'control of corruption' between 2004 and 2007.<sup>115</sup> The Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), Liberian National Police (LNP) and Special Security Service (SSS) are gathering new recruits and putting them through training processes. Combined with this, the continued presence of UNMIL is assuring a maintained peace.

### ***3.6 Transitional justice in Liberia***

As of August 2010, the only transitional justice mechanism that has been implemented in Liberia is the Truth and Reconciliation. The mandate for a TRC was added to the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended the war. The TRC Act that followed mandated the commission investigate gross human rights violations' violations of international humanitarian law, massacres, rape, murder' extra-judicial killings and economic crimes that contributed to violence.<sup>116</sup> Some have argued that the CPA's call for a TRC encouraged some of the warlords to sign the agreement, believing that a TRC would grant them amnesty as it did for so many in South Africa.

The TRC did not begin its work collecting statements until 2006; by the end of 2008 they had collected over 20,000 from around Liberia, in addition 2000 statements

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<sup>114</sup> From 2007 to 2009, there had been a 44% increase in school enrolment; 350 health facilities, 20 clinics and several hospitals and health centres were restored. GOL, PRS, 17-19.

<sup>115</sup> World Bank Institute, Worldwide Governance Indicators, 2007.

<sup>116</sup> Article IV Section 4(a) of TRC Act.

from persons living in the diaspora. The first public testimonies were held in Monrovia in January of 2008. For the first few months of these public testimonies, none of the major players volunteered their testimonies and the TRC did not use its power to subpoena them. In March of 2008 the TRC issued a statement that they would give immunity to anyone who volunteered their testimonies – a promise they did not have the legal authority to give when it came to certain violations of international law.<sup>117</sup> It convinced the major players to give their testimonies; however, none asked for immunity nor admitted their crimes.

There were many victims who were willing to give their testimony in public; however, critics have commented on the lack of respect they were given and how it was not apparent how their testimony could in any way provide the ‘cathartic release’ that TRCs are claimed to provide. As Gberie notes,

Often even the Commissioners, looking un-shocked, would smile or laugh, the early solemnity of the proceedings abandoned. Worse, onlookers, including some Commissioners, would giggle when victims narrated unusual forms of atrocities, including particularly creative forms of rape. In fact, the Commissioners often tend to subject victims to more probing examination, as in actual trials, than they do alleged perpetrators (whom the lawyerly Chairman routinely refers to as ‘accused’).<sup>118</sup>

By the middle of 2009 the final report was released, which two of the commissioners refused to sign because they did not agree with the final recommendations. Which particular findings they were unhappy with is unclear, but there is some suspicion that they were paid to delegitimize the report. Aside from providing good evidence that Charles Taylor’s army was behind two major massacres

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<sup>117</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission, ‘Policy paper on general immunity for all the TRC witnesses’ (Public Bulletin No. 2, 31, March 2008).

<sup>118</sup> Lansana Gberie, ‘Truth and Justice on Trial in Liberia’ *African Affairs*, 107:428, 2008, 459.

in 1993<sup>119</sup>, the report provides no major insights into any systematic violence, massacres or root causes of the conflict; there was almost no critical analysis regarding the period in question nor recommendations that addressed the structural issues that might have contributed to the war in the first place.

Instead, the report made a number of recommendations for retributive justice. The report called for the establishment of a hybrid court similar to that implemented in Sierra Leone – the ‘Extraordinary Court’, and that 98 individuals should be tried for war crimes and violations of international humanitarian law.<sup>120</sup> Eight of these individuals were listed as ‘major perpetrators’ including Charles Taylor – already on trial at the Special Court for Sierra Leone for crimes he is accused of committing in that country, in addition to current Senator for Nimba County, Prince Johnson who immediately responded to this recommendation with a threat that there would ‘be trouble’ if anyone tried to arrest him.

Also included in the report was a list of 50 individuals who were accused of being supporters of the war and who would face public sanctions – without the right to due process or the ability to appeal – which would ban them from public office for 30 years. On this list was President Johnson-Sirleaf for the financial contribution she admitted, and apologized for making, during the initial stages of Charles Taylor’s campaign. Another recommendation was that locally-based ‘palaver hut’ trials be held throughout the country and under the supervision of local government officials. The lists of individuals who were recommended for some type of punishment seems

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 460.

<sup>120</sup> Republic of Liberia, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Consolidated Final Report, Volume II (unedited, released 30 June 2009), 268.

arbitrary – most of the names appear only on these lists and the details as to why these individuals were selected for punishment are nowhere in the report.

There were a few recommendations for amnesty; among those was Joshua Milton Blahyi, previously known as General Butt Naked. During the public testimonies in Monrovia in January 2008, Blahyi admitted – some say boasted – to killing no less than 20,000 people, including babies and children, but that he was truly sorry for these crimes. More than that, he explained that the reason he had committed such atrocities was that, as a traditional high priest in his tribe, he was possessed by the devil. Since the war, however, he had become a born-again Christian and was effectively a ‘new man’ who was repentant for the wicked things he did in his previous life. Because of his willingness to tell the truth and because of his apparently legitimate repentance, he was granted amnesty. However, if he did indeed commit the crimes that he testified to, the TRC does not even have the jurisdiction to grant him this amnesty, again indicating the massive confusion that the commission has regarding its mandate and jurisdiction.

After the final report was released, the legislature voted to put any debate concerning the document on hold for one year to ‘consult with their constituencies’; as of August 2010, nothing has been done with the report and it is hardly even mentioned in the Liberian media. President Johnson-Sirleaf announced her plan to seek re-election in 2010, effectively announcing that she would not support these recommendations should they ever make it through the legislature.

### **3.7 Religious background**

#### **3.7.1 Demography**

Having examined Liberia's sociopolitical background, a brief background of religion in Liberia will help us begin our discussion of the sociopolitical role of Pentecostalism in the country. The 2008 census indicates that Liberia is composed of 89% Christians, 9% Muslims, and less than 1% practitioners of exclusively traditional religion.<sup>121</sup> Prior to this census, the only figures available were from the 1980s, which found that 40% were Christian, 40% were adherents of ATRs exclusively, and 20% were Muslim.<sup>122</sup> The apparent conversion of practitioners from ATRs to Christianity is likely due to the major increases in evangelism throughout West Africa, and especially due to the displacement of many Liberians in rural areas who found themselves in Ghana, Sierra Leone and Monrovia where they encountered Christianity.

The Portuguese had contact with the area that is now Liberia as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century, but Christianity was only truly established in 1822 when Baptist settlers from the United States arrived and built Providence Baptist Church on the coastal stretch of land they named Christopolis, now Monrovia. Other mainline Protestant denominations - the Methodists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Presbyterians, were established in Liberia soon after and formed the religious backdrop for Americo-Liberians, especially those in power under the TWP, who were often ministers or Bishops in these churches. The Roman-Catholics have been present since the mid-

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<sup>121</sup> LISGIS, Liberia Census, Released May 2009.

<sup>122</sup> U.S. State Dept, Religious Freedom, 2007. Based on other sources, these percentages vary widely – for example, in 1986 it was estimated that the percentages of Muslims and Christians was 5% and 15%, respectively. At the same time, many Muslim leaders claimed that 50% of Liberia was Muslim. Gifford, *Christianity and Politics*, 262.

19<sup>th</sup> century, but only in 1906 did they establish themselves permanently.<sup>123</sup> Among the Christian population, the United Methodists and varieties of Baptists were historically the most numerous,<sup>124</sup> although the many varieties of Pentecostalism, charismatic Christianity and non-mainline evangelical Christianity have been growing phenomenally since the 1980s. Also represented are Seventh-Day Adventists, Jehovah Witnesses and very few Latter-Day Saints. A 2010 Pew survey found that 69% of Liberians identified as Christians (19% identified as Muslim and 12% as following an ATR); 26% of those Christians identified as Pentecostal; 4% as Episcopalian, 17% as Baptist; 12% as Methodist; 11% as Lutheran, 19% non-Protestant and the remained some ‘other’ Protestant.<sup>125</sup> Gifford provides a detailed outline of the growth of evangelical churches which he writes, ‘met a very profound need’.<sup>126</sup> During the Doe regime, there was also a huge increase in the number of American missionaries to the area to assist the planting of new churches,<sup>127</sup> though indeed since then independent and break-away churches are proliferating. A few of this US-based variety, such as African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal-Zion, Church of God in Christ and Assemblies of God, have been in Liberia since the early 1900s, but most are less than thirty years old. In Monrovia, at least, these newer churches form a large percentage of the Christian population. Many of these churches are also adamantly anti-ATR, and actively demonize anything to do

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 55-56.

<sup>124</sup> In 1989, according to estimates, there were 67,109 Methodists, about the same number of Baptists, 75,000 Catholics, 30,000 Lutherans, 20,000 Episcopalian, 3,000 Presbyterians; all of which were claiming to be growing substantially, at this time. Ibid, 51-57. Baptists in 1998 numbered 60,000 members according to the Baptist World Alliance, [www.bwanet.org](http://www.bwanet.org); Roman Catholics in 2004 numbered 170,000 members according to diocese counts reported on [www.catholic-hierarchy.org](http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org). UMC claims 168,300 members, [www.UMCliberia.org](http://www.UMCliberia.org).

<sup>125</sup> The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*, April 5, 2010, Chapter 1, 23.

<sup>126</sup> Gifford, *Christianity and Politics*, 286.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 235-9.

with traditional practices or world religions, especially Islam. Though Pentecostalism has its roots in the United States, and many American missionaries visit Liberia, this type of Christianity is very uniquely Liberian in many regards, which will be elaborated upon throughout this thesis.

Muslims have been in the area which is now Liberia since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, perhaps earlier, but never in significantly large numbers. The demographic concerning the different types of Islam is even more complicated, because many Muslims might not self-identify as belonging to a certain school or sect. They are overwhelmingly found among the Vai of Western Liberia, the Mandingo who are dispersed throughout the country, and the Fulah who have immigrated from surrounding West African countries, especially Mali, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone. Most Liberian Muslims are Sunni, of the Maliki school, and syncretism with ATR is relatively common. Ultra-conservative Muslims are few, although Wahhabi Muslims are represented, especially among the Mandingo, in addition to the somewhat militant Iranian-supported National Repentant Muslims.<sup>128</sup> There are a number of Sufi Muslims, specifically from the Tijaniyyah order or the Qadirriya order; many of these individuals are immigrants from Mali, Guinea or Senegal. There are also a few thousand members of the Ahmadiyya sect, especially among the Vai.<sup>129</sup> A small number of Shiite Muslims are among some of the Lebanese community, many of whom have resided in Liberia for up to three generations.

While the census has shown that very few Liberians practise traditional religious exclusively, many Liberians hold traditional beliefs and monotheistic beliefs

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<sup>128</sup> Gifford, *Christianity and Politics*, 287.

<sup>129</sup> Based on email correspondence with John York, Head of Inter-religious affairs desk of the Liberian Council of Churches (LCC), 20 July 2008; Mohammad Sheriff, Vice-President of the IRCL, 14 July 2008. See also Gifford, *Christianity and Politics*, 261-263.

concurrently, and belong to both churches/mosques while also being members in traditional secret societies known as Poro (for males) and Sande (for females), described below.

### 3.7.2 *Traditional beliefs - Poro and Sande*

Poro and Sande societies were first observed in West Africa in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. These societies were acephalous and hierarchical systems of political and social organisation, legitimised through the leaders' contact with the spirits responsible for advising humans how to act in order to appease the spirits and thus contribute to this order. In traditional Poro society, 'there [was] no absolute good or evil but instead, an ambivalent power which [was] given moral meaning through ritual action'.<sup>130</sup> The methods used for obtaining power were within a very organised and rigid structure of spiritual authority that translated into authority in society at large. The spirit of the forest, or 'Bush Devil', was an ambivalent but particularly powerful deity that needed to be supplied with blood sacrifice in order to 'keep people in their proper places in society, to prevent individuals from transforming in ways which are dangerous to others and to ensure orderly progress from one phase of life to another, such as from childhood to adulthood.' Because this concept was a 'mainstay of culture order', it was considered deeply problematic when the necessary sacrifices were not made according to Poro tradition.<sup>131</sup> Over time, Poro became diffused by modernisation and monotheistic religion and the traditional Poro leaders lost much of their exclusive authority to deal with spirits and the power they offered.

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<sup>130</sup> Ellis, *The Mask*, 273-274.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 278-279.

They lost even more control during the war when these institutions became disrupted by violence, destruction and displacement. Being aware of certain rituals that enabled a person to tap into the spirit world, previously off-limits to anybody without the proper spiritual legitimacy, fighters tried to access the power directly through blood sacrifice and, according to some rumours, cannibalism.<sup>132</sup>

Now out of war, Liberians perceive a profound imbalance in the spirit world – one that is dominated by evil and which is reflected in the many problems that the country is facing in the post-conflict period. In addition, they are confused as to what type of rituals and beliefs are legitimate. In response, new spiritual solutions are sought out, especially in Pentecostal churches.

From here, we will go through the data that was collected during the research conducted within these churches.

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 223-237; 259-266.

## ***CHAPTER FOUR*** ***The general role of Pentecostalism in Liberia***

### ***4.1 General Pentecostal framework***

All the Pentecostal churches considered throughout this thesis perceive the same general Pentecostal framework: since the beginning of time, God and Satan have been engaged in a spiritual war. Each side has its own agents, powers and goals. For God, the goal is the establishment of paradise and eternal life on earth – the Kingdom of God. For Satan, the goal is maintaining misery, sickness, death and destruction in the Kingdom of Darkness. Every human being is considered to be fighting on one side or the other in this battle. For Pentecostals, the goal is to get as many people as possible on God's side, who are actively fighting against the evil forces, so that Satan and his agents can be defeated, and the Kingdom of God can be fully established. The only way a person can truly be on God's side, Pentecostals believe, is to become 'born again' by 'giving one's life to Christ' and being 'active in the spiritual battle' in a number of ways.

Based upon this general framework, all Liberian Pentecostal churches have the same two major emphases: how the power of the Holy Spirit leads to personal transformation, and that the power of the Holy Spirit will solve problems. Based upon these emphases, in this chapter I argue that the most general role of Pentecostalism in Liberia is to help people make sense of and feel that they are active in addressing this-worldly problems – personal and national. The types of explanations they give, and the types of methods they employ, vary widely between churches but all Pentecostal churches, as opposed to their non-Pentecostal counterparts, are unique in that in addition to offering Christian theological discourse and rituals that one finds in the dwindling mainline

denominations, they also take seriously local spirits, witches, curses and dreams; they adapt rituals of appeasing, warding off and casting out malevolent spirits; they situate themselves within the *same* spiritual worldview that they had before they became Pentecostals, and the *same* spiritual worldview that their non-Pentecostal counterparts still perceive. Pentecostalism in Liberia, then, is a manifestation of primal religiosity that incorporates one particularly powerful spirit – the Holy Spirit – into the existing spiritual framework, with the purpose of reordering the spirit world so that the rampant evil in the physical world might be stopped.

## **4.2 Personal transformation**

### *4.2.1 Before Conversion*

In order to fully understand the process of becoming ‘born again in Christ’, and what it means to be ‘truly’ converted, it is necessary to first describe Pentecostal perceptions of non-Pentecostals. Prior to being born again, every person is considered to be one or more of the following: a conscious servant of Satan, traditional religious practitioner, Muslim, mainline Christian, or a ‘lukewarm’ Christian. As will be seen, each of these types of Christian is ultimately considered to be, whether they realise it or not, a servant of Satan who must be truly converted to Christ in order to help expand the Kingdom of God. Because they are agents of Satan, they are perceived to be influenced and/or manipulated by any variety of Satan’s spiritual agents: ‘principalities, powers and forces of darkness’, also referred to more generally as ‘demons’.

#### *4.2.2 Conscious agent of Satan*

Witches, sorcerers, ‘Satanists’, ‘juju men’, ‘medicine men’, diviners and wizards are just a few of the terms given to those individuals who are believed to be conscious and active agents of the devil, in communication with him, and doing things on earth specifically to expand Satan’s kingdom. Such individuals are dangerous because in order to increase or maintain their own power in the spiritual and physical world, they must attack and harm others, especially Christians. They attack individuals in a variety of ways: they cause spiritual and physical problems in a person’s life, compel people to hurt others and themselves, and keep them from realising the ‘truth’ that, when learned, will necessarily lead to faith that is powerful enough to defeat these dark forces. Pentecostals are clear that anybody who is an active Satanist will be in essence a ‘wicked’ and greedy person who harms others in a relentless search for power. However, the behaviour of a witch or Satanist might not be easily seen by others; factors that can indicate possible involvement with the dark world are sudden increase in wealth, sudden political power, or the suspected Satanist’s family members or close associates being consistently injured, killed or having bad fortune. Despite the short-term physical benefits of consciously serving Satan, Pentecostals often point out that Satan’s power is ultimately destructive; individuals who utilise it are bound by a number of physical and spiritual restrictions that keeps them from, among other things, enduring happiness, health, respect, stability, friends and family.

#### *4.2.3 Traditional religion and cultural practices*

Unlike the individuals discussed above, who are believed to be fully aware of their dealings with Satan and who are more often the subject of rumours and suspicions than actually witnessed ‘in action’, more commonly encountered are

those who are serving Satan without their realising it. One major type of ‘disguised Satan worship’ occurs within the secret societies: Poro, Sande, Bodio or, ‘secret cults’, ‘traditional practices’ or ‘cultural societies’ as many churches call them where, for example, CEPC’s Rev. Dagadu often explained, ‘they do human sacrifices and worship Lucifer... and families perform rituals to dedicate their children [to Lucifer]’.

The practitioners of traditional religions are considered to be particularly dangerous because they are so widespread in Liberia and are able to work under the ‘disguise of culture’. These individuals and their societies are ‘even fought for by the government, so we can keep these demonic things open!’ Because children are born into them, they are raised thinking that such practices are ‘natural’ and ‘make me a true Liberian’, yet at the same time they belong to a Christian church. According to Pentecostals, those who practise traditional religions are not intentionally malevolent, as are witches and Satanists who harm others for personal power, but they are believed to be ‘wicked’ in other, less obvious, ways. For example, those who have gone through bush school are perceived to be affiliated with cultural practices like polygamy, blood sacrifice and worshipping nature, all of which ‘glorify Satan’. In addition, because they are ‘stuck in Liberia’s old ways’, these individuals are often considered to be selfish, violent, bigoted, lazy and uneducated. Even more threateningly to Pentecostals, many members of secret societies will also be active Christians. Particularly because they appear to be benign ‘through the devil’s trickery’ yet are ultimately forms of Satan worship, these traditional societies and practices are a serious threat to God’s kingdom.

#### *4.2.4 Islam*

Muslims are considered to be dangerous for similar reasons to those of the practitioners of traditional religions: most Muslims are born into the faith, and raised to believe that it is their ‘culture’ to be Muslim. Pentecostals consider Muslims to be especially dangerous, though, because they have global presence and influence, spiritually, physically and financially, and are part of a wider threat of worldwide Muslim domination. Further, Muslims are perceived to be especially strict about maintaining their religion; Pentecostals often explain how Muslims will not allow family members to convert to Christianity, lest they break with the family completely. Most Muslims are not considered to be actively serving Satan; rather, they are simply victims of another Satanic trick to win souls to his kingdom.

Pentecostal perceptions regarding Muslims vary widely; some will consider them to be simply misguided but ‘they are human too so I cannot judge’; others will consider them ‘selfish and lazy’, ‘immoral’, ‘bad influences’; others go so far as to call them ‘rapists and murderers’. Others, though far fewer, are positive about how they behave, pointing out that they are ‘good business people’, that they are ‘strong in family’ or, ‘tolerant people’ but still, ‘need to be turned to Christ’ for the sake of their own salvation, and the building-up of the Kingdom of God.

#### *4.2.5 Mainline and ‘Other’ Nominal Christianity*

Pentecostal churches are distinct in that, in addition to adherents of other religious, they also consider many nominal Christians to be agents of Satan; many mainline denominations, especially the Catholics, are not considered to be preaching ‘the truth’ or ‘do not have the Holy Ghost’ and therefore are ‘under

Satanic control'. This even applies to those who are very serious within their mainline denominations, including the priests and the pope, because although they are committed, they are committed to the 'wrong' type of Christianity as expressed in one CEPC service:

The pope, the most famous man in the world, but do you know who he is really serving? He thinks he is serving God but Catholics, they are the biggest cult in the world, serving the dark side. It is deception! None of the Catholics have the truth, it is why they come here!<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the standard by which Pentecostals judge a person to be a proper Christian depends not on denominational affiliation or authority, but rather whether or not a person has made a conscious decision to give his or her life to Christ, and become born again.

#### *4.2.6 Signboard Pentecostals; Lukewarm Pentecostals*

Lukewarm Pentecostals are those individuals who were either born into a Pentecostal church or who have joined one, but are not considered to be truly born again. Thus, just like members of mainline denominations, they are not considered to be 'true Christians'. As Rev. Dagadu often expressed it, 'When you are a lukewarm Christian, God will spit you out, so make your mind up.'<sup>2</sup> Such Christians are perceived to still be 'in the world', 'not serious' or 'going to church just because it is the thing to do'. They are also often considered to 'use Jesus as a magician', 'try to make the pastor do all the work', or to go to church only when 'they have a problem'. They might even claim to be born again, but unless it was a true transformation, they are still on Satan's side.

Lukewarm Pentecostals are considered to be particularly dangerous because they can 'hide' amongst good Christians as a type of 'demonic secret agent' to

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<sup>1</sup> CEPC Prayer meeting 23 Nov. 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Kakata revival 26 Oct. 2007.

hurt people within a church; they might also unconsciously bring demons into Christian gatherings: Satan can easily manipulate and enter into an ‘unfilled heart’. More worryingly, Satan is believed to devote most attention to those in Pentecostal churches who are ‘lukewarm’, because ‘Satan is a legalist, he knows how to best infiltrate Christian groups’. A weak Pentecostal, then, is believed to be especially vulnerable to Satanic influences so as to keep that person from going over to God’s side completely – which will be hard to avoid in a spirit-filled church – and at the same time, they can carry a variety of demons that will afflict more lukewarm Christians who are within close proximity.

#### ***4.3 The Born-again Transformation(s): Conversion, Sanctification, Baptism***

Although Satan and his agents are clearly a strong and pervasive force, they all are perceived to have weaknesses and limitations; these evil forces can be overcome only with the true power of God, which Pentecostals perceive only themselves to be in possession of. Thus, one major approach to defeating the devil is by ‘winning the souls of his agents’ through conversion. While this basic message is fundamental to Pentecostal and charismatic churches, it is important to highlight the differences between churches’ theologies and more significantly, what these differences mean for the members of each church. It will become clear that there is a major difference between formal theologies – as explained in brochures, reports<sup>3</sup> and structured interviews with leaders – and the actual applications of these ideas – as addressed in most sermons and most interviews with leaders and members.

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<sup>3</sup> Many of these reports and brochures are produced specifically for distribution to churches outside of Liberia, especially in the US, and are thus unsurprisingly doctrinal. This is especially true for Winners’ and SUPC, which have headquarter churches that have these established doctrines.

It is helpful to situate Pentecostal conversion experience(s) within the history of the Pentecostal movement, and the different ways conversion, sanctification, spirit baptism and water baptism are understood depending on the churches' theological and institutional roots and influences. Doctrinal differences are characteristic of Pentecostal churches; some of these differences have historical roots. Early in the Pentecostal movement, for example, there was a major split between those who followed either the 2-stage or 3-stage conversion theology<sup>4</sup>; another split occurred between those subscribing to either Oneness theology or belief in the Trinity.<sup>5</sup> Therein lies one of the biggest difficulties in trying to describe what Pentecostalism is in any setting; as will be outlined below, there are major doctrinal differences between the churches under consideration in Liberia, depending on their respective influences and history.

#### 4.3.2 *Winners' Chapel*

Winners' Chapel has a very clear theological message about conversion, as explained in their brochure:

Man's first step towards salvation is godly sorrow that worketh repentance. The New Birth is necessary to all men, and when experienced produces eternal life... Baptism in water, by immersion, is a direct commandment by our Lord, and is for believers only.... In the Name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Ghost... The Baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire is a gift from God as promised by the Lord Jesus Christ to all believers in his dispensation and is received subsequent to the New Birth. This experience is accompanied by the initial evidence of speaking in other tongues as the Holy Spirit Himself gives utterance... We believe in the doctrine of sanctification as a definite, yet progressive work of grace, commencing the time of regeneration and continuing until the consummation of salvation at Christ's return.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> These divisions have roots in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Holiness movement in North America, which taught that 'three-stage work of grace' after which a person had 'entire sanctification'. See Allen Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 27; 45-47.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 47.

<sup>6</sup> Oyedepo, Living Faith Church Worldwide, Inc., *Tenets of Faith*, printed for Winners' Monrovia.

An assistant pastor of Winners' explained this doctrine to me:

To be born again is to give life to Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and saviour, accept him as your Lord, live by his lifestyle, surrender and make him Lord of your life. A lot of people say they are born again, but it is not true. For example, you ask a person and they may interpret it as 'are you Christian'. At Winners' [to be born again] you must be convicted of your sin, surrender your life, and then scripturally you are born again. From the standpoint of regeneration, we see it as a process – the spirit is born again but the soul is not. It needs to be worked on, so a renewing of the mind, where a person comes daily to keep hearing the word of God. The person may be born again, but still needs to be worked on.<sup>7</sup>

This doctrine is also taught clearly in the membership classes, which every new member is required to attend upon the 'new birth' that occurs during conversion.

This membership class culminates with a session in which members are taught how to receive the baptism in the spirit, evidenced by speaking in tongues. During this class, they ensure that everybody present has 'given their life' to Christ; those who haven't are asked to leave. None has yet gone through water baptism, which takes place one day each month for all converts, after their completion of the membership class.

#### 4.3.3 SUPC

SUPC, as a branch of the global United Pentecostal Church (UPC), is distinct among the three case study churches in their subscription to Oneness theology, which is made evident in all of their pamphlets, documents and on their website:

The basic and fundamental doctrine of this organization shall be the Bible Standard for full salvation, which is repentance, baptism in water by immersion in the Name of the Lord, Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, with the initial evidence of speaking in tongues, as the Spirit gives utterance.<sup>8</sup>

In certain interviews this theology was repeated:

<sup>7</sup>

Interview with Pastor Anthony Nagbe, WCI, 9 June 2008.

<sup>8</sup>

UPCL Vision statement, 11; SUPC website, SUPC brochure.

First of all you have to repent of your sins. And then, the second one you have to be baptised in Jesus' name. There are people in other denominations that baptise in the title, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, but with us, we baptise because we know the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost is Jesus, so we baptise in that name. Then after that, you have to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, speaking in tongues... From there, you are saved, and then from there you live an overcoming life, you have to live a holy life... You should have a Christian behaviour, a Christian attitude. And then from there, you should always grow to be better in the things of God...it is a gradual process to perfection.<sup>9</sup>

Also in sermons, pastors clearly emphasised that in order for a person to be truly born-again, they need to go through these steps:

Salvation is just four steps away from you! The four steps to be saved are: faith, repentance, water baptism and receiving the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in tongues as the Spirit of the Lord gives the utterance!<sup>10</sup>

SUPC conducts weekly water baptisms for new converts, and it is expected of them to receive the spirit baptism, evidenced by speaking in tongues, the moment after their immersion.

#### 4.3.4 CEPC/CHRISEM

CEPC/CHRISEM, like Winners' and unlike SUPC, considers a person to be born again and thus eligible to be baptised in the spirit if he or she has fulfilled '[The] simple condition of salvation revealed in the New Testament: repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.'<sup>11</sup> Unlike Winners', though, CEPC/CHRISEM does not subscribe to the doctrine of initial evidence of speaking in tongues. Total sanctification occurs on the inside, as Rev. Dagadu explained:

Well the first thing is realising that you are a sinner, and realising that there is a need for a saviour... so you ask God to forgive you. You accept Him in your heart, believe that He did die for your sins, and that He was raised from the dead. Then, you will be washed in his blood, cleansed from all unrighteousness, and then by faith, you are born again. You are filled with the

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Sis. Margaret, SUPC, 10 January 2008.

<sup>10</sup> SUPC, 1 November 2009.

<sup>11</sup> CEPC/CHRISEM Brochure, Printed October 2007.

Holy Spirit... We do water baptism after a person has given their life and gone through the membership class, but it is not necessary for salvation, it is just a symbolic act for the member... Speaking in tongues, if it happens it is a gift but it is not required for salvation... and it is not the only way that you can show your salvation, like the initial evidence of other churches. Salvation is simple, you accept Jesus, and you are saved... From there you progressively become more purified, you are saved, but perfection is a gradual process.<sup>12</sup>

Thus we can see clear differences between the theologies of these three churches, not surprising given their institutional links and histories as detailed in Chapter Two. First, both Winners' and SUPC believe in initial evidence of speaking in tongues, while CEPC/CHRISEM sees tongues as simply a 'gift'. For each church, there is a 'crisis' experience upon which a person becomes totally sanctified; after that, perfection is gradually attained. This 'crisis' occurs at different times: for CEPC/CHRISEM and Winners', sanctification occurs upon conversion, and spirit baptism can occur at any point after, while SUPC maintains that spirit baptism can only occur after or at the moment of water baptism, and only after that is a person sanctified.

#### **4.4 The ideal born-again lifestyle**

All Pentecostals claim to have experienced a positive change within themselves as a result of their becoming born-again. It is simply impossible, according to the beliefs of these Pentecostals, for a person who has been filled with the Holy Spirit not to be transformed. However, as will be seen, this transformation is perceived both as something that is automatic and unintentional – given to a person directly by the Holy Spirit, and also as something that requires a conscious effort by an individual – made possible or easier with the help of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Rev. Dagadu, 10 June 2008.

#### *4.4.2 Ideals*

Often, a born-again believer's personal transformation is addressed in very general terms. For example, at Winners', 'When you receive the Holy Spirit you will be a different person, you will be a better person, you will never be the same again!'; 'When you accept Jesus Christ, people will not recognise you anymore, you will be a shining light where there used to be darkness!' At SUPC, 'If you are born again there is a change in your heart. If there is a change in your heart then there is a change in your attitude'; 'The union between the believer and Christ signifies the end of a life of sin and the beginning of the life as a child of God... You must get to the Pentecost so you can experience the change in your life... Pentecost will change your way of talking, way of dressing'; 'The problem with Christianity in modern times is they preach that you can be saved without a change in your life. When Calvary came along in my life, it changed my life, I walked differently, I talked differently, I am keeping a lifestyle with Jesus!'; 'God is willing to transform you, to change your mind, your attitude, and you will never be the same.' CEPC repeatedly preaches that, 'When you are born again and you give your life to Jesus, your spirit man will change. Renew your mind with the word of God. Your mind and behaviour will change'; 'You must not do it [act] out of zeal, it should become a way of life for you'; 'Allow the word of God to be rooted in your spirit so people can see the Holy Spirit in you. Some people just make you feel good; others make you feel bad; that is their spirit speaking... they are a new person in Christ!'

The churches are also frequently specific about what types of behaviour are wrong for true Christians. For example, a typical sermon at Winners':

The orthodox churches don't emphasise [the movement of the Holy Spirit] and there people don't encounter God. They are just following tradition, man-made rules, and priests... Many people in these churches are still drinking,

smoking, womanising and there is no difference. When they come to ‘Winners’, their lives are transformed and they have a changed lifestyle.<sup>13</sup>

Winners’ most common emphasis as evidence of good behaviour has to do with the activities that one took part in, which should always ‘glorify God’: a good Christian should never skip church, should participate in ‘Kingdom Service’, associate with other good Christians, and attend moral social events that involve ‘constant praises to God’. In one sermon, Pastor Solomon warned that ‘Liberians must be true Christians, not corrupt merry-makers’ and told them to do away with corruption and greed as a result of ‘merry-walking’ and to ‘do those things that are right in the sight of God’.

The details of the idealised Pentecostal lifestyle of SUPC, as expressed in their mission statement printed in most pamphlets and reports, strongly reveals its history and enduring links to the US:

Godly living should characterize the life of every child of the Lord, and we should live according to the pattern and examples given in the Word of God. We wholeheartedly disapprove of our people indulging in any activities, which are not conducive to good Christianity and godly living, such as theatres, dances, mixed swimming, women cutting their hair, make-up, any apparel that immodestly exposes the body, all worldly sports and amusements and unwholesome radio programmes and music. Furthermore, we disapprove of our members having television sets in their homes because of the display of all of these evils on television. The Scriptures teach us that the wearing of ornamental jewellery and expensive, showy clothing is not in harmony with the Christian lifestyle. We therefore disapprove the use of ornamental jewellery such as chains, necklaces, rings (with the exception of wristwatch and wedding band). The Grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lust, we should live soberly, righteously and Godly. We understand the scripture to teach the restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of His Holy prophets since the world began.<sup>14</sup>

While most of these guidelines, imported from classical UPC doctrines in the USA, are totally irrelevant to the average Liberian, even those that are relevant are demonstrably not enforced. One need only observe the pastors’ wife in all her

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Anthony Nagbe, Winners’ Chapel, 9 June 2008.

<sup>14</sup> SUPC Website, accessed September 2010.

adornments, sleeveless blouses, make-up and changing hairstyles, and one pastors' own professed love for Arsenal football club, to be convinced of the flexibility of these guidelines.

Still, SUPC is demonstrably concerned about its members' immorality as it pertains to social activities, drinking and sexual behaviour. The most common emphasis in SUPC is to do with morality and living a new lifestyle that 'showed others that you are a child of God'. This includes being careful about the activities a person takes part in, and with whom:

When you are leaving your past behind, you don't want to associate with other people. You should find other friends; when you are backsliding, you call that new person for help. You will find people who are going in the same direction.<sup>15</sup>

They also frequently refer to a transformation in one's attitude, which should convey love, selflessness, acceptance and respect:

We should strive for unity in the church...God is telling this to the church; we should try to help one another... Sometimes, someone is doing their best at something but you just criticise! Don't do it!<sup>16</sup>

Sister Margaret explained what she called 'the basics of a born again lifestyle' to me in an interview,

When you receive the Holy Ghost you live an overcoming life, you have to live a holy life. You can't be in the church, attending, then going to nightclubs, movies... You should have Christian behaviour, a Christian attitude. You should love people; when you are saved, God wants you to show that to other people.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, one of the most common emphases in CEPC/CHRISEM was moral behaviour, specifically pertaining to sexual relations, for example:

The devil will tempt you with nice things [through a wealthy man] – car, jewellery, house, job – if you want God to come in you must be willing to make a sacrifice – to clean it out, let it go, and let God come in... If you have opportunity for an affair where you can get these nice things, don't jump at

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<sup>15</sup> SUPC Bible study, member comment, 6 May 2008

<sup>16</sup> SUPC Bible Study, Sis. Margaret, 6 May 2008

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Sis. Margaret, 10 Jan 2008

this opportunity! Say, ‘No! I don’t want it! I gave my life to God, so take away all these nice things!’ I want you to experience the real kindness [of a man].<sup>18</sup>

They differ from one another in the frequency in which they preach about the need for Christians to avoid all association with ‘idolatrous’ religious practices:

[The Church of the Lord] Aladura people pray without any [spiritual] basis; they use candles, smoke, animal sacrifice; but you only need the Holy Spirit! Do you know God? Or do you come here and then go to the prophet healer? If you do, then you are dealing with the devil! A good Christian should not be there!<sup>19</sup>

Idolatrous practices also pertain to ‘traditional’ or ‘cultural’ practices: ‘If you are born again, you don’t need any of that bush school! They have no power. You need to leave that secret cult because it is tying you to the devil!’ Also, ‘Maybe everyone in your family is a witchdoctor or a traditional leader, ok, they are your family but you need to be careful around them. Remove yourself from that place, because if you are born again then you cannot have anything to do with them.’

#### *4.4.3 Changes – Testimony*

Not only did the churches perpetually preach about the need for members to change spiritually and physically so that all thoughts and actions were according to God’s will, and were obedient to God’s word, most members described similar general changes in themselves since they’d become born again at their Pentecostal church. Among men, the most common behavioural change brought up was that they ‘stopped womanising’ or ‘stopped fighting’; among women that they, ‘stopped having boyfriends’ and ‘gossiping’. For example, one Winners’ member explained how,

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<sup>18</sup> CHRISEM Women’s Conference, Rev. Mrs. Dagadu 15 November 2007.

<sup>19</sup> CHRISEM deliverance clinic, 1 July 2008.

When I became born again, I stopped womanising and going to nightclubs... I used to do that all the time, it was a big weakness. But then I became born again and I just stop, I open my Bible, I am changed.

Another explained, 'I used to be so angry. I drive a taxi, and somebody would argue over the price and I would get out of the car, I would beat that man! But now, I am calm in such situations; I just pray to Jesus and he comes to me and I am calm'.

One SUPC member explained, that 'I love this church because it is teaching and doing all that the Bible requires. My old church has too much sin, nobody stopped their bad behaviour. Here, people really change, when I came, I really changed'. Another explained, 'I did things before I became born-again at SUPC, like fornication, bad movies with friends. I cut down on it all'.

A CEPC member similarly said,

I love CEPC because when I came here, I learned that the truth was not in my past church... I was with my aunty from childhood so she would take me to my old church; I didn't like it, it didn't do anything for me. I love CEPC because they preach the truth, and it has helped to change my life.

Other CEPC members were more specific, 'I changed immediately and started going to church, praying, reading the Bible, evangelising'; 'I changed by listening to the word, I started to go to church activities, stopped having boyfriends, stopped making confusion [getting into quarrels] with people, stopped being vexed, became humble'; 'I changed by not going to spirit healers anymore to try to get quick money. Now I know God will provide for me'. Also,

As a Christian, you need to do certain things, like do away with lying, stealing, and other things that do not glorify God. You need to set an example in the community; let people ask you who you are, then you can tell them your church and title, but don't just go around telling people, being boastful. If someone asks you first say, 'why do you want to know?' Before I got born again I did not know this type of lifestyle, but now I am always doing things that glorify God.

Such testimonies were common among Pentecostals in other churches. For example, ‘When I was born again, most things I used to do, I don’t do anymore, like fornication, I womanised, and lived with my girlfriend. I have brand new life’; ‘I believe some things I used to do were not good in the sign of God, such as lying, going on street, womanising, stealing’; ‘There was no light in my old place [Catholic church] - I was not born again. I went to clubs, fornications, I lied. I never knew the importance of my body...when I got born again I changed.’ The pastor of PAWOM explained, ‘At my Baptist church they were not serious, so I went to Pentecostal Apostolic, came under the anointing of the Holy Ghost. After that I didn’t drink or smoke; I started seeing my life becoming new, people who knew me saw changes. I haven’t looked back since then.’

Although there are some differences in the exact interpretation of the term ‘born again’ among Pentecostals, and some clear differences between the doctrines of each church regarding sanctification, when dealing with the lifestyle that is expected to follow born-again conversion, the general idea is exactly the same: when you are filled with the Holy Ghost, you change; you will be able to feel this change, and others close to you will be able to observe this change. Although in some cases these changes occur naturally to a person as soon as they became born again, others are more gradual, and require the believer to make a conscious effort to live a more righteous life, which is easy to do with the help of the Holy Spirit.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Of course, these doctrinal differences are observed in non-Pentecostal strands of Christianity. The theology of human effort, assisted by the divine, was a distinct aspect of Calvinism and Methodism. In the Pentecostal churches, however, these theological roots were not acknowledged in any interviews, sermons or writings.

#### **4.5 Solving problems**

In addition to the major emphasis upon the personal transformation that a Pentecostal is expected to undergo, another central emphasis in all these churches is that a born-again Christian should expect a successful and problem-free life. All the churches agree that if a Pentecostal is faced with difficult circumstances, then something is wrong and there is some spiritual explanation and plan of action in order to change that. Throughout these examples, it will be seen that both personal and public problems are always perceived to be rooted in the spiritual realm and are a manifestation of spiritual disorder; often, though not always, they are explained to be physical manifestations of pure evil. These explanations enable Pentecostals to make sense of the problems they face, and to feel that they have some control over their situation.

Pentecostals have the vision that life will be problem-free when the battle is won and Satan has no more influence; all this provides people the reference point from which they can situate their problem-ridden reality. At the same time, the churches perpetually focus on the positive: as a born-again Christian, success is just around the corner; to find this success a believer simply needs to tap into the endless source of spiritual power that is offered by the Holy Spirit, and use it appropriately. Not only is this power useful for one's personal problems, but it is strong enough to influence events that affect Liberia as a whole, and is what needs to be properly utilised in order to establish the Kingdom of God, manifest as this-worldly paradise. As we will see, the ways in which Pentecostals tap into and use this spiritual power is heavily influenced by elements of primal religiosity, not strictly Pentecostal or Christian ideas.

#### 4.5.2 *Victory, breakthrough and success*

A major emphasis in all these churches is that a Christian should be successful and problem-free; if he or she is not, then there is something wrong, and there is a spiritual explanation or plan of action that can be employed in order to change that. True salvation is inextricably linked with a believer having a good life *here* and *now*. There is comparatively little concern with issues pertaining to heaven and hell, retreating from ‘the world’, suffering, asceticism, the end-times and serving an angry God purely for His sake. Instead, Pentecostals are concerned with what they can do for a generous God *so that* they will see some degree of positive physical, emotional and spiritual change in this life; if not today, then soon.

The message of success was clearly preached in every Pentecostal and charismatic church I encountered in Liberia, albeit to slightly different degrees, and also to an extent in the mainline denominations. It is pervasive, perpetual and growing. Within one minute of entering one of these churches, the message is clear on the church banners and flyers given to members. All churches have a ‘Month of...’ or ‘Year of...’ that usually end with a motivational phrase. The theme of Winners’ Chapel 2007 was ‘From Glory to Glory’ and in 2008 ‘On Eagles’ Wings’; monthly themes include ‘Praise Works Wonders’. Their weekly newsletter is called ‘Victory Bulletin’. The CEPC/CHRISEM motto is ‘We Arise, Go Forth in Jesus’ Name’ and a large banner in the HQ church reads, ‘Don’t Quit, Because Champions Don’t Quit!’. The SUPC weekly radio programme is called, ‘An Hour of Power’ and 2007 was their ‘Year of Worship and Revival’.

The names of the conferences, crusades and revivals also convey a message of success. CHRISEM puts on the largest number of these events: ‘Daughters of Sarah, Women of Destiny, Women’s Conference 2007’; ‘Gathering of the Eagles

2008', 'Walking Under an Opened Heaven' with the sub-theme, 'Breaking Hidden Curses for Conquest'; along with a monthly revival at each branch which they call 'Champions Night'. NCWOCC's monthly conferences and revivals were called, 'Total Prophetic Warfare for Breakthrough'.

All sermons in these churches have a specific theme and biblical passage, but whatever the topic, they will always incorporate dozens of general phrases of encouragement, many of which are exactly the same in every church. Each phrase is always shouted loudly, sometimes repeated, and always met with wild applause and cheering; in some of the phrases the congregation will hear the beginning and begin yelling the rest of it along with the pastor. Often the congregation is told to 'shout it out loud', or 'find three people, shake their hand and tell them' one of these phrases.

Some of these are meant to convey the power that God has in making you successful, or helping you to achieve your goals: 'When He says yes, no man can say no!', 'God will fight your battle!', 'With God all things are possible', 'God will deliver something in your hands!' 'God will take you from the bottom and bring you to the top', 'The Holy Spirit will strengthen you to stand!', 'What God has said only you can delay it!', 'God is going to intervene on your behalf!' 'Tonight we find progress in the name of Jesus!', 'God will bring light into your darkness!'

Others are simply encouragement that one will experience positive changes: 'Today you are set for breakthrough!', 'After today your life will never be the same!', 'Any dream that you have will be achievable!', 'those who are oppressed today you will be set free!', 'It's time to move forward!', 'what you don't expect, you won't experience!', 'When you discover, you will recover!', 'Your time is coming!', 'If it happened to me, it can happen to you!', 'Your destiny does not

depend on what men say!' Breakthrough is coming!', 'Every Satanic stronghold tonight will be broken!' 'The enemy is under your feet tonight!', 'Do not give up! Change is just around the corner!' and 'Forward, ever, backward, never!'

Some of these are meant to instil a general feeling of personal self-worth. One of the most popular is, 'You are the head and not the tail!'; others include, 'You are special', 'You are not an accident', 'You have a gift', 'Once a failure now you are a success!', 'Once you were the victim now you are the victor!', 'Once you were a beggar but now you are a giver!', 'You are an extraordinary person!', 'You are an extraordinary child of God!', 'The lie of the devil is that you are a nobody in life!' 'Whatever condition you are in, you can make it!' and 'You have something to offer!'

These messages also often constitute an entire theme or topic of the sermons during a crusade, revival, or Sunday service: At CHRISEM/CEPC: 'Obedience to God's Word: Key to Victory', 'With God all things are possible', 'Be strong at your broken places', 'Nothing too hard for the lord', 'Let the God that I know Give me Victory', 'Step Forward and Stretch Out Your Hands', 'What do you want on your platter?', 'Power must change hands now!', 'Breaking through in the midst of crisis', 'When curses are broken new things and favour will spring forth', 'This is your time and season for conquest over hidden curses', 'Transforming from weakness to might', 'Taking it with confidence in your season', 'Rejection doesn't deny you of being an eagle', and 'You are a Champion'.

At Winners': 'Time to move forward', 'Attitude for Higher Altitude', 'Wisdom for total health', 'Twelve steps to financial prosperity', 'How to secure unlimited help through praise', 'Winning pattern of increase', 'The golden key to my high places' and 'The pace-setter for progress'.

At SUPC: ‘From Calvary to Pentecost’, ‘Victors Through Christ’, ‘The Key of David and the Weapon of Praise’, ‘Don’t just sit there, do something!’, ‘We always triumph in Christ’, ‘Nine reasons why the devil can’t stop you’, ‘You have the power of the Holy Ghost’ and ‘For A Child of God, No Condition is Permanent’.

These messages are consistent across the Pentecostal spectrum, for example in some non-case study churches: ‘Total prophetic warfare for breakthrough’, ‘Break away from poverty’ and ‘Stubborn conditions must change’, ‘Making your way through the storms of life’, ‘God will bring light into your darkness’, ‘Unlocking God’s great potential in your life’, ‘Advancing to the next level’, ‘How to acquire money on a supernatural level’, ‘Moses did it, so can you!’, ‘How to become great’, ‘Five secrets to overcome failure’, ‘Un-measurable success for committed Christians’, ‘God has made provision for you’, ‘Losers in the eyes of men, but useful in the eyes of God’, ‘Getting to your highest level’ and ‘Beyond the limits’. Despite the vague nature of many of these phrases, there is a clear idea of what exactly these Christians are looking for in terms of success and victory, based on sermons and members’ testimonials and prayer requests.

#### *4.5.3 Motivational and Inspirational Performance*

While there are periods during Pentecostal services during which the congregation and leaders are relatively quiet and calm as one would find in mainline denominations, for the majority of the time they are enthusiastic by any standards, especially during the revivals, crusades, and prayer meetings. In no other context did I see people as excited and energetic as they were during certain periods during these events. Even the relatively sedate Sunday services and mid-week services of the other churches were incredibly active and enthusiastic during

certain periods of the service. During the allotted times for personal prayer, which range anywhere from 30 seconds to half an hour during the praise and worship period, everyone prays out loud, some in tongues, some yell, some cry; while praying some will look into the air with their eyes closed, pumping their fists, some pace back and forth, some prostrate themselves, some run in place in slow-motion, some face the wall and hit it repeatedly, some kick, clap, scream, dance, shake, fall over, laugh hysterically, ululate, thrash around on the floor. During ‘guided’ prayer, during which one or two leaders will pray a few sentences, and leave the group to pray about that topic for a certain amount of time. Acting out one’s prayers is common, for example, to ‘smash the wall that is holding you back’, or to ‘stomp down the force that is oppressing you’, or ‘punch down the thing in pushing you away from your dreams!’. The congregation is told to ‘put that thing in your mind and now let it be gone!’ to a five-minute frenzy of shadow boxing, stomping and jumping.

The singing and dancing part of the praise and worship period, a favourite of many church-goers, is an opportunity to have fun and a time to release stress, anger, frustration or whatever negative energy was plaguing them, and replace it with the positive message that would certainly follow during the sermon. Those that cried during prayers would always, in the end, be smiling and excited by the message that they heard. The therapeutic value and importance of this is obvious. The person praying silently, calmly, still, with head bowed, or the one that does not take part in singing or dancing, is the one who looks totally out of place.<sup>21</sup>

The sermons are a time of intense enthusiasm and energy, and are heavily dependant on the charisma of the speaker. It is typical for the speaker to be with

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<sup>21</sup> On a few occasions, the pastor would stop the group praying if a person was not ‘into it’, call that person out. Twice, I was that person.

microphone pacing back and forth across the stage, totally drenched in sweat, using no notes, periodically entering the crowd, screaming, jumping, telling the congregation to ‘say with me’, and generally ‘flowing’, as Liberians refer to a pastor who speaks well and enthusiastically. The excitement of the congregation is obvious. It is typical for people to run to the front to throw money at the speaker’s feet. Members are often clapping or yelling out ‘Amen!’, ‘Preach!’ or, ‘So true!’ and waving handkerchiefs along with the message. Sometimes members of the congregation are suddenly ‘slain’ in the spirit; others might simply run circles around the room. These messages can sometimes generate so much energy that the congregation will ‘get excited for Jesus’, as it did during one CHRISEM revival in Kakata, when nearly twenty pastors, after being encouraged by Rev. Dagadu, ran around the building with plastic chairs on their heads.<sup>22</sup>

Motivational themes are also found in the mainline churches, but to a lesser degree, and the real difference is the style of delivery during the sermon. Sermons in mainline denominations will rarely go longer than thirty minutes; however charismatic, if they go over that time, the congregation is visibly not happy.<sup>23</sup> In the Pentecostal churches, however, if the congregation is tired of the preaching, then they certainly do not show it. The excitement will be as strong from the first minute until the last, sometimes lasting up to ninety minutes. A major aspect of these churches, then, is that religion is not something to think about, it is

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<sup>22</sup> This was considered to be an especially enthusiastic response; the woman next to me mentioned, ‘You see what Papi does to the people? Lord, he can preach!’ CHRISEM Kakata Revival, 22 October 2007.

<sup>23</sup> For example Providence Baptist Church had their anniversary service and invited the Bishop of Philadelphia Church, Rev. Harris. Once he’d been speaking for 25 minutes, despite it being very engaging, charismatic and relevant, the congregation was visibly and vocally ready for him to stop. At one point, at 35 minutes, the keyboard just started playing lightly over his voice while the Rev. of PBC stood to the side, ready to take the microphone away. He eventually stopped at 40 minutes and I overheard complaints about it being too long from people around me, and five different people whom I spoke to after the service said it was ‘too long’ as well. PBC Anniversary service, Bishop Harris, ‘It’s not about you, its about Jesus’, 29 February 2008.

something that must be *experienced*; again, this is another example of Pentecostalism as a manifestation of primal religiosity. Of course, Satan is not part of any African Traditional Religion, but the idea of a powerful and potentially malevolent spirit is indeed. Here, Satan has been incorporated into the spiritual worldview, and the way he is perceived to behave is according to primal ideas, not Pentecostal ones.

#### 4.5.4 *Specific victories*

Clearly these churches are concerned about helping believers find victory – both for themselves and for Liberia as a whole – and perpetually address this very generally. But what exactly does it mean to be victorious? Rev. Dagadu's usual opening prayer is paradigmatic of the goals for many Liberian Pentecostals: 'Ease someone's pain, O God, dry someone's tears, restore and rehabilitate the children, give promotion, bless project, extend education, heal broken marriage, give child, release demonic possessed property, arise and let the enemy be scattered, every witchcraft spider-web melt, make Liberia rise again!'<sup>24</sup>

In all the churches under consideration, the most common personal problems for which members' want divine help are employment, expanding one's business, improving a marriage or finding a spouse, having children, taking care of children, beginning basic education or completing higher education, emotional problems (stress, fatigue, nightmares, anxiety) and mild illness (headaches, vision problems, stomach problems, rashes), severe illness including near-death experiences.

With respect to public problems, all of the churches under consideration were concerned with the same major issues affecting Liberia: lack of development, conflict, inequality, poverty, corruption, dependency, violence, robberies,

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<sup>24</sup> CEPC Paynesville Revival, Rev. C. Dagadu, 'Gathering of the Eagles', 6 June 2008.

joblessness, illness, ethnic tensions and lack of education. They all addressed these issues periodically in their sermons, though not as often as they addressed personal problems, and many Pentecostals who were interviewed referred to these problems explicitly when asked what Liberia's biggest problems were. Indeed, these are the problems that most Liberians, Christian or not, would testify to having. However, the Pentecostal churches are claiming to have explanations and solutions that others do not, and are addressing these problems in both primal and Christian spiritual idioms that others do not.

#### **4.6 Problem solving**

Pentecostal churches' most general solution for solving personal and public problems is to have faith that God will help. After that, Pentecostal churches have a huge variety of explanations for the causes of these problems, all of which are ultimately based on the spirit world. In this chapter I differentiate three distinct types of causes: Satanic attacks, punishment from God, and 'God's plan'. In all of these categories, though, the ultimate cause of personal problems is to some extent attributed to the individual believer's thoughts and behaviour, and the ultimate cause of national problems is to some extent attributed to the nation's collective thoughts and behaviour, which can either allow Satanic influences, inhibit God's help, or both.

##### **4.6.2 Satanic attacks**

###### **4.6.2.1 Personal problems**

While Winners' rarely devotes primary attention to the varieties of demonic activities and influences, curses and activities of witches, they often allude to the demonic realm within other sermons and during intercessory prayer. Demonology

is an indispensable aspect of Winners' Christianity; Oyedepo has published dozens of books that go into great detail about the subject, many of which are on sale in the church bookshop, including *Satan Get Lost*, *Overcoming Forces of Wickedness* and *Breaking Hidden Curses*. The role of Satan is also addressed consistently during church services, meetings, and in their weekly newsletters. In one issue of the newsletter, for example, Pastor Martins wrote:

Believers whom God created to rule and have dominion over all the works of His hands have become slaves to everything they were to rule... Christians become prey to sickness. They are ravished by disease. Affliction and pains are daily identified with them. Satan assaults them with every conceivable misery that could be named. Some even die by reason of this satanic oppression without enjoying any peace in their body as God ordained. And Satan is the architect of sickness, disease, affliction and death. Yet God created Satan, and when God gave the righteous authority to be in charge of His creation, He clearly had Satan in view. For if Satan was made and God says everything He created has been put under man's feet, then Satan and his accomplices should be under man's feet! ... Sickness is an enemy that should be trodden under [for] good. Yet if you go to hospitals, you'll see many believers lying helpless in hospital beds looking unto doctors to stop their misery! This is abuse of the highest order! ... Satan is behind every sickness and disease. Every sickness is a direct manifestation of the devil. (Eph 6:12) There is no man anywhere that is responsible for sickness and disease in your life. Satan is behind it all. In order [sic] words, every sickness or disease has spiritual roots... Sickness or disease is not an infection. It's an oppressed [sic] of the devil. Therefore, don't take sickness as ordinary; its satanic oppression. Slight headache is slight oppression.<sup>25</sup>

In a typical member's testimony published in the weekly newsletter:

During the last service, we were anointed for protection and afterwards God delivered me from the hands of Satan. My photo was taken to a juju temple in order to kill me. Of the twelve photos on the evil altar, eight persons were successfully killed. When it came to my turn, the priestess worked on my photo for two nights yet she couldn't invoke my spirit on her mirror. So she waited so she could join forces with her more powerful husband in order to deal with me. It was at that time that someone went to consult her because of his stolen items. One of those involved in the case happened to know me and when he saw my photo, he questioned the priestess who then narrated the story to him. That was how I heard the story. I want to thank God for delivering me from her hands.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Victory Bulletin, 16 September 2007.

<sup>26</sup> Victory Bulletin, 24 February 2008.

Pastor Solomon rejected the idea that demonic affliction and curses were able to affect strong and devout born-again Christians. Those believers who had been born again, but who were not yet strong enough in the faith, however, were open to Satanic attack.<sup>27</sup> With this thinking, he considered himself and his family as ‘totally protected from demonic attack’ despite his conviction that ‘enemies are constantly trying to gain access’ to cause harm. He admitted that among his congregation, ‘not all are protected, many people are sliding’ and that there were few Christians who were spiritually strong enough to the point that they could ignore the Satanic realm as a source of their enduring problems. Disobedience, particularly not tithing, is one of the major causes of demonic affliction among his members:

A lot of people will come with their financial crisis and they say that it is witches, but it is not witches. [When they talk to us] 99% discover that they are open for attack because they don’t pay their tithe... We show them when you don’t pay your tithes, you give room for devil... When you pay your tithe, then you are putting yourself under protection.<sup>28</sup>

Demonic attack might also occur in when a person is disobedient in terms of morality:

Let’s take HIV for example. It happens during illegal sex and the devil knows the Bible, he knows Christians and at the first shot of disobedience he can attack. So it [demonic attack] is always a result of disobedience, and going against God’s word, in one way or another.<sup>29</sup>

Despite Pastor Solomon’s claim that true believers were immune to the destructive effects of generational curses, Winners’ still highlighted the need to be aware of other types of curses, for example:

A lot of people living in the city are not prospering not because of witches and wizards but because of self-inflicted curses. If you’re paying tithes but

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Pst. Solomon 4 December 2007.

<sup>28</sup> Also, ‘Pay your tithes. If you don’t then you are open to demons, satanic attack. What tithe does is it brings you into protection. For example, one man I know would put dollar salary into his pocket, go to bed, wake up and it has disappeared, so demons they had come to pick his pockets.’ Interview with Pastor Solomon 4 December 2007.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with pastor Solomon 4 December 2007.

things are tight for you, consider your parents. If you're not taking care of them, you're placing a curse on yourself.<sup>30</sup>

SUPC periodically devoted entire sermons to explicating the ways the devil could attack and cause problems for believers' personal lives. On one Sunday morning, for example, Pastor Benda gave a sermon called, 'Do not allow the devil to wear you out', in which he expounded upon the 'three ways the devil makes everything hard and seem impossible to you wherever you turn'. While the majority of sermons at SUPC are not primarily focused on this theme, still, like Winners', the belief that Satan is actively trying to hurt a Christian is indispensable and is frequently alluded to within sermons and during prayer meetings.

During prayer meetings, women's/men's groups and during interviews, the 'demonic realm' was often addressed explicitly. Individuals would often articulate whatever problem they were having in terms of Satanic attack, most of which were considered to be the result of an individual's sinfulness or 'backsliding'. During one women's group, for example, an older woman described how she was having stomach pains that were not helped by going to the doctor. She knew that these were demonic attacks because, she explained,

I saw my sister with this doll, and she stuck this pin into the doll. I asked what she was doing and she said it was not my business. So later I found the doll and it had this piece of my lappa [cloth] on it, so I know she was doing witchcraft on me, and that was causing me pain. I went to pastor and we prayed together, he laid hands on my stomach and cast out this thing inside me, it healed immediately!

Like Winners', SUPC pastors believe that certain spiritually strong individuals are immune from harm from demons. As Rev. Benda explained,

I was brought up in this life; I lived with men of God from an early age so I never did anything worldly... I am always growing spiritually and I obey God [so] I have never needed deliverance... I have been in Christ so long, I

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<sup>30</sup> Victory Bulletin, 9 March 2008.

don't believe they [demons] have had power over me They can affect others – when you are in Christ, they can attack you but it can happen to a bigger or lesser degree [based on] your spiritual status.<sup>31</sup>

Pastor Benda referred those whose spiritual status was not as strong as his own when he asserted, ‘Bad things can happen to good people! Remember Paul and Silas? I don't care how great you are in the Lord the devil can speak to you. But you have to rebuke him in Jesus name!’

SUPC, like Winners’, considers demonic influence to primarily be the result of a believer’s disobedience. They focus significantly more attention than Winners’ on moral disobedience (and less on tithing). A typical example was given during one Sunday sermon, when Pastor Benda explained how, ‘[When you] walk away from God... [that] allows the devil to hurt you. Pray with me, O God do not let the devil steal their joy, breakthrough, blessing, and victory. Show them your wonderful path and let their dreams come to pass.’ In another sermon, he explained, ‘The devil lives in entertainment clubs, he lives in the bar, he lives in movie houses... If you go there, you are asking the devil to come inside!’ and similarly, ‘When you commit fornication, you are giving your life over to Satan’.

Undoubtedly, CEPC/CHRISEM is the most preoccupied and detail-oriented when it comes to demonology. It is typical for entire sermons on Sundays, in revivals, during crusades to be devoted to explaining specific activities of the devil and agents – demons, witches and wizards, water spirits, land spirits, Islamic spirits, Rosicrucian spirits, and many more – which are able to gain access into an individual or somebody close to that individual, ultimately causing problems in that individual’s personal life. Bible Studies and Sunday Schools will often focus on demonology, whether it is with reference to the Bible or not. Their country-wide crusades and revivals are held specifically for the purpose of ‘Removing the

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with Rev. Benda, 3 June 2008.

stronghold of the devil over Liberians'. The ministry has also produced dozens of audio cassettes that are available for purchase. These cover a huge variety of themes; some go into specific detail about a single type of demon, while others will address an issue thematically, for example explaining all the ways a demon might gain entry. Because of the depth and breadth of their demonology, CEPC/CHRISEM will be considered in more detail here.

CEPC/CHRISEM divides the ways that Satan can affect an individual as possession, oppression, suppression and depression. Born-again believers cannot be possessed because they have the Holy Spirit: 'possession is when the person has no will to do what he or she wants, his mind is crazy'. But even the most devout born-again Christians, including pastors, are at risk of Satanic oppression, suppression or depression. The devil is believed to cause direct misfortune in the lives of good Christians, but also to influence those close to him or her in order to cause problems indirectly:

Sometimes we feel that when we are a pastor we don't need deliverance [from demons]. But look, the devil destroyed Job in three dimensions: physically, spiritually, affliction (Job 4:12-21). The devil will use people that are close to the pastor. The devil can use your wife to rebel against him.

CEPC/CHRISEM teachings are very explicit and detailed about the strong role of the Satanic kingdom in a believer's life. Taken out of context, many of these would seem to be instructions on practising 'the dark arts', particularly in their descriptions of the activities of witches and wizards. In one sermon during a conference revival in Kakata, a 'demonic stronghold of Liberia', Rev. Dagadu explained,

We have three types of witches, red, white and black. Black witches are the most powerful and wicked, they have the ability to operate as marine spirits; it is also called alpha-omega spirits ... Every Christian has a star. The witches do astral projection into the spiritual realm and they cover

your star... Then you can have nightmares, you can have failure in relationships [and] failure in jobs.

During a deliverance class, a pastor explained,

There are three classes [of witches], depends how many people you have killed... They are more at home in the spirit world than in the physical world. In the spiritual world they have palaces, skyscrapers... good homes, people working under them... Physically, they are poor, blind. They see in the spiritual, not the physical. They are barren, they have spiritual children... They take your destiny away, make you to not prosper and kill those around you and give you illness.

There are also recurring reminders about the dangers of using traditional religious practices, which are under the domain of Satan:

If you have a covenant with the ground, you are cursed and the ground will not give fruits to you. How has the devil dedicated you to the ground? As Africans, we are dedicated or your neighbour has dedicated you when you are child... Also, we braid hair, cut it and bury it in the ground. Any of these covenants will curse you and you will never reap from the ground, you will always struggle... The good shall inherit the good of the land, but not if you are cursed.

In another sermon,

There are some women who are unstable because of their names. For example, 'Munah' means somebody who is unstable. Any woman who can manipulate, suppress, control and intimidate people has a witchcraft spirit... [and she] can get that from her African name.

Dreams are often explained to be a significant indicator of demonic influence; ignoring them can be dangerous:

I want [the meaning of] some dreams to be revealed to you. If you are taking a test and you don't know the answers, it means you will never excel... If you are walking on a dusty road, you will have struggle... If you are wandering in the dream, you will have no breakthrough.

In addition to frequently teaching their congregation that problems are often the result of these various demonic forces, they just as frequently expound upon the believer's role in allowing these forces into his or her life. Like Winners' and SUPC, the opening through which demons gain access to believers is described as the result of some type of disobedience. However, CEPC/CHRISEM goes into far

more detail. For example, on day two of a five-day deliverance class, the pastor explained the variety of ways Satan attacks believers:

How can a believer be polluted and contaminated? Answer: sin. That is disobedience to God. Like if you are living with a boyfriend or girlfriend. You hear the word of God and you go against it. Sexual sins give way to demons. [If you have] sex with a man who has 50 demons, then you get 25 of them; he's left with 25. Hatred brings in animals spirits, rejection, rage, violence. [You can get them from] the places you go, like the Aladura [A large AIC from Nigeria] church, where they make you take off your shoes. They make sacrifices at the church and the demons enter through your feet, on the polluted ground. If you go to a medicine man, roll around, then the spirit can enter you... If you watch rated X shows and go to video clubs.<sup>32</sup>

Based on all these classes, sermons, cassettes and interviews, the two most common reasons given for this demonic entry are the believer's own disobedience and generational curses. CEPC/CHRISEM does not focus upon one type of obedience more than any other, and it can be anything from murder, not paying tithes, immorality, adultery and robbery, to wearing a necklace made of sea shells or buying food from an alleged witch. For example in one sermon, Rev. Dagadu explained, 'The reason that you are unable to bear a child is because you are going out to entertainment clubs, where you lose your faith and demons can enter'. In another sermon, he explained that 'The demon of childlessness can enter when you wear clothing that has been witched by somebody, so be careful who you buy your things from'. In some cases, certain afflictions are presented as being most likely caused by a particular demon. For example: 'The Queen of the Coast is responsible for you not being able to find a good wife. If you are having marriage troubles, you should look there first'. However, this is certainly not always the case: 'You have relationships, but they never work out...what is the problem?

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<sup>32</sup> Such statements were common: 'Don't envy people. When you envy people, witchcraft will come in', 'Many of us try our best. We go to church, prayer meetings and so on but the problem we have is obedience. Disobedience has cursed the life of many valuable people. It is not the holy oil, miracle, it is obedience which leads to victory. (Joshua 11:4-8). Some of you come to church but you don't have devotion in the home. Every Christian has its enemy – witchcraft, pride, lying are all your enemies to you.'

You want to get married but it never goes... You have a demon from your childhood, from having a broken home... You need to look there'.

The potential explanations become even more varied when considering CEPC/CHRISEM's other recurring emphasis: generational curses. Through these, Satan can affect an individual, even if a believer is completely obedient and faithful: 'Whole generations were cursed from the first to third generation... curses can follow you and block your way. When you are cursed you do so much but receive very little.' Believers are often encouraged to 'go back to the village' to ask about stories in their family; by doing this, they will find dozens of situations in their long and far-reaching family history through which curses were transmitted, and which are causing a variety of problems that will never be overcome without directly identifying and then 'breaking' them. The overall picture in CEPC/CHRISEM, therefore, is that every individual needs to be constantly aware of their vulnerability to Satanic attacks because of even 'the smallest transgression or disobedience', and the 'cursed African spirit' that has resulted from generations of demonic beliefs and rituals.

In each of these churches the devil is perceived to be an entity with countless agents that are responsible for bringing problems to Christians. The churches agree that 'not every problem is caused by demons', but that very many are; therefore this aspect must always be considered. While CEPC/CHRISEM elaborates far more extensively and often on the ways Satan can hurt a believer, this idea is still indispensable to SUPC and Winners' spiritual worldview. The churches would absolutely agree with one another that Christians need to be vigilant because Satan is fighting a battle against them, and that one way of maintaining vigilance, and thus avoiding personal problems, is by being totally obedient. Each church differs in which type of disobedience they address more

often: Winners' focuses on tithing and immorality, SUPC on immorality, and CEPC/CHRISEM on idolatrous practices, immorality, and not tithing. Whatever they focus on most, however, the churches agree with one another about the definition of disobedience.

Despite this similar general worldview, there are some major differences. For example, while CEPC/CHRISEM frequently refers to generational curses that can affect even the most devout born-again Christian, Winners' and SUPC consider such curses to have been 'wiped out totally, and forever' in the moment that a believer becomes born again. The churches also differ when considering the extent to which a person can ever be totally 'safe' from demonic attack. In CEPC/CHRISEM, this is practically impossible, while in Winners' and SUPC, particularly strong believers, as long as they stay strong, can be confident that whatever problems they have are not the result of demonic attack. While I have only focused on three churches here, this general worldview is pervasive across the Pentecostal spectrum, yet encompasses similar variety when looking at certain details.

#### 4.6.2.2 Public problems

All the churches allude to Satan's attacks in a very general sense as a major source of Liberia's problems. For example, at CEPC/CHRISEM:

Liberia has more demonic activity than any African country – that is why the country is in darkness – the devil loves darkness, he loves dirt. We have all symptoms of demons where ever you see them – D plus D plus D equals three D!

Asst. Pastor Nagbe of Winners' explained: 'One of the goals of our ministry is to liberate man from oppression of the devil; one of the great oppressions is poverty.'<sup>33</sup> Pastor Solomon explained the vision of Winners' to be:

Liberation from oppression of the wickedness. To liberate humanity from all over the world from the oppression of wickedness, by preaching the word of faith. In 1994 Oyedepo had the vision, to fight in a holy war for the preservation of Africa, including Liberia.<sup>34</sup>

CEPC/CHRISEM frequently reminds its members that one of their most important roles is to convert the masses, as taught in one Bible Study:

There are three-billion Christians in the world, and six-billion people... So you and I have tremendous, tedious work to do to capture the other three-billion people, otherwise Jesus will not arrive... Liberia needs Jesus, and it is up to you... You must spread that message to the masses.

In all of the churches, members' who bring guests are applauded; those who do not are often chided; sometimes directly, as in one CEPC Sunday sermon:

Ok, stand up if you have brought someone to church this year. [About half the congregation stands]. You people standing, God is happy for you, you are working to expand His Kingdom and he will bless you for that... But what are you people sitting there for? While you are sitting there the devil is increasing in Liberia, and you just think people will come to Christ on their own! No, they have the devil there so it is up to you to show them what God can do, so if you don't go out an evangelise to the people, God does not want to look at you in this church!

Sometimes the churches are more specific about activities that are indicative of encroaching Satanic forces. Very often, the churches refer to the 'heathenistic' religious or cultural groups in Liberia, including Muslims, Jehovah Witnesses, Aladura, Freemasons, and Hindus. Similarly, widespread traditional practices are given as reasons for Liberia's downfall, and its continued suffering.

CEPC/CHRISEM addresses these issues most often, as in one typical sermon:

The Queen of the coast controls all of West Africa... Astral spirits monitor all the waters and have contact with Lucifer, who made different types of spirits to do these things. His main purpose is to destroy the church [and] people who

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with Pastor Nagbe, 14 May 2007.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Pastor Solomon, 4 December 2007.

support church... These are the people that instituted Bush Society [Poro and Sande], fraternity [Free Masons] and celestial churches [Aladura]... All these things can cause problem[s] for Liberia.

Winners' will also identify specific demonic activity in the nation and act to wipe it out, to avoid any potential harm that might be done without their spiritual intervention. One good example occurred in July 2009, when the National Traditional Council of Liberia opened their headquarters, inviting a number of traditional leaders from West Africa, including the 'Queen of Sheba' of Ghana who represents 'African cultural values'. President Johnson-Sirleaf attended the ceremony and spoke in clear support of helping Liberian traditional leaders with a role in Liberian public life. During this event, Bishop Oyedepo of Winners' came to Monrovia on a visit that had been planned for months. That night at the Winners' revival he made a declaration to 'cast the devil out of Liberia for prosperity'. The next day, the Queen of Sheba left the country even though, Oyedepo told the congregation, she had been planning to stay for much longer. This was a direct result of Oyedepo's presence, and especially effective because of the prayers that Winners' members had delivered against the traditional meeting the night before.<sup>35</sup> One Liberian newspaper reported that,

Her arrival at the invitation of certain groups and traditional leaders in Liberia had raised concern in some Christian quarters but it took the arrival of Bishop David Oyedepo and the thrilling crusade to send the queen of witches hurriedly scuttling out of Liberia.<sup>36</sup>

As we can see, many of these explanations for personal and national problems have little reference to purely Christian ideas except that these 'demonic acts' are considered ultimately to be Satanic attacks that can only be combated with help from God. While they are demonising traditional African spirits and rituals, they are effectively legitimising their power through their constant reference to the

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<sup>35</sup> Phone interview with Dulan Tucker, WCI, July 28 2009.

<sup>36</sup> *National Chronicle*, 24 July 2009.

ways it can harm Christians. Pentecostals are therefore not converting and then adopting a new spiritual worldview from that which they had before; rather, they finding different ways to work within it. Thus, I suggest that Pentecostalism in Liberia is not the same as Pentecostalism elsewhere, particular with regard to their discourses surrounding problems caused by the devil, and one should be careful about making generalizations about the form(s) and role(s) of Pentecostalism around the world. Of course, there are many instances in which the churches allude to specifically Christian ideas and practices that we might find in other contexts outside of Liberia; typically, this occurs when they address the problems that they face as a result of being punished by God.

#### *4.6.3 Punishment from God*

In some cases, problems are not considered to be wholly or even partially caused by Satan, but are rather some sort of punishment from God. According to this thinking, God wants to bless a person or nation to be successful, but can directly punish a person or nation by actively causing problems, or God can more passively ‘hold back blessings’ – blessings that could solve an existing problem that may have been caused either by Satan or ‘natural events’ – because an individual’s or the nation’s collective lack of faith, disobedience, or lack of prayerfulness. The churches are very similar in the ways they deal with this.

##### **4.6.3.1 Personal problems**

A central aspect of all of the churches’ ideologies is that a true born-again Christian has dominion: he or she can have anything he or she wants, as long as there is sufficient faith. Once such faith is demonstrated, then God, who has already won the spiritual battle, can make these things manifest for the believer.

However, if the believer is lacking in faith, obedience and living a righteous life, God has ‘no reason’ to bless a person. In a typical Winners’ sermon, for example, Pastor Solomon stressed that, ‘The hand of God will rest upon you; it will rest upon your family, career, business, in the name of Jesus, but the hand of God is also for punishment, as in Deuteronomy 2:15. Everybody repeat after me, “for punishment”’. In another sermon, ‘A lot of people are waiting for God and God is waiting for you! Something must be done to trigger your highest miracle! Something tangible must be done... God does not give blessings to those who have not worked for them... Your solution is around the corner but you must be deserving!’ The same message is often heard at SUPC:

God wants His people to be free... He is not only interested in you going to heaven; He is interested in your well-being! He said you are the head and not the tail! But until you become dissatisfied with whom and where you are, God will not act! Until you realise that you are not a chicken but an eagle, God will not act! God will get angry with you!

CEPC/CHRISEM also delivers the same message:

A child of God does not fear the enemy... The Lord gave victory to Joshua over his enemies because he obeyed... God will not give you victory when you are cheating on your wife or husband. How will God give you victory when you have boyfriends? If you want victory, obey God’s words. God gave the Israelites victory when they repented... Those who disobey God are not blessed; only those that obey God are, as in James 2:24-26.

Not only will God hold back blessings, but the churches also emphasise that if a person is not obedient, then he or she will be directly punished. For example, in one Winners’ sermon:

The good hands of God also punish those who go against the will of God and those who try to harm the children of God (Deut 2:15)... The problem is that you are not living for God. Once you start living for God, He will never punish you, and the good hands of God shall cause you to soar over every problem in your life.

Similarly, SUPC explained:

Disobedience brings judgment.... God is a God of love, but also the God of judgment. When God gets tired of us sinning, the last thing he does is to

bring judgments, and these judgments are just. Genesis 6 tells us that by the wickedness of man ... [and] something went wrong. Adam and Eve disobeyed and God closed the gates of Garden of Eden. The generation today is no different from the generation of Genesis chapter 6.

And CEPC/CHRISEM:

God will punish you! Do you hear me? He will punish you if you disobey, you will see problems, you will see pain and misery. God loves you so much He will make you suffer so that you see the error in your ways. So when you are having a problem, a sickness, an attack, don't just look to Satan because God might be telling you something! He is just!

#### 4.6.3.2 National problems

Sometimes, God's present displeasure, manifest in Liberia's enduring problems, is cited as a result of the multitude of sins that took place before and during the war, which have not been repented. Consider an explanation given by one CEPC member regarding the reasons for the war:

The war, it happened because God has a special role for Liberia. We might not know what it is yet, but maybe he needed us to go through the trials of war, so that we could come out the other side and be something great. We will see, God works in mysterious ways, but I can't question God.

In another example, in one CEPC sermon, Rev. Dagadu explained that,

During the war, the boys out there did wicked, wicked things. Satanic things, they worshipped the devil, they took drugs, they raped... Everything was wicked, and they have not repented; God is still angry, God is keeping Liberia under hostage until this wickedness is dealt with!

And SUPC often referred to 'God's wrath' on the sinful nation:

How can we escape the wrath of God? How? How? How? Even when God took the people from the land of Egypt and brought them to the wilderness, you know what God told them, I am taking you to land of milk and honey, go and possess the land. When they disobeyed, God told Moses, I changed my mind... In fact, He told Moses, "You know these people that you brought, they are worshipping idols". And the wickedness became so much... When they heard about the Promised Land, they refused! When God said you will possess, they did not build! Listen to me, church, this is Liberia! You are on the land you did not suffer for. Let me tell you, church, if you don't make right with God, God will replace you. Brothers and sisters, God has something for you to do and you are running away from it. If you don't do what God wants you to do, the consequences will be dangerous!

In many other sermons, Liberia's problems were explained to be God's way of punishing immorality among Liberians. As Assistant Pastor Nagbe of Winners' explained,

God looks at immorality and He removes blessings. Liberia is full of immorality, look at the entertainment clubs, the clothes girls are wearing, the adultery... God will not bless this country if we act like this! He will take our blessing away, he will punish us until we reform and repent!<sup>37</sup>

Similarly, Rev. P. Dagadu stressed that, 'The family is falling apart, women do not respect their husbands; husbands cheat on their wives, children go out and get drunk and have sex. God will not bless a place that acts in this way!'

#### *4.6.4 God's plan for your life*

In addition to these two types of explanations for problems, which are both ultimately the result of a believer's own disobedience and/or lack of faith, the churches will also often describe some problems as the 'will of God', 'God's plan', or based on 'God's time'. They are not considered to be punishments from God, or even indications of his discontent. Rather, they are considered to be part of a larger plan, not always totally clear to the believer, that is ultimately good, however painful at the time. When a believer goes against these plans, then it is considered to be an act of disobedience which, as described above, can result in God holding back blessings. All churches address this issue similarly and frequently: 'Sometimes things won't happen because it is not in God's agenda. Nobody has any idea where God is about to take you'; 'God has a unique plan for your life'; 'God says you must come down and be broke, or else he cannot use you.' This applies to tragic events, too. For example at a CEPC funeral of a

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with Anthony Nagbe, Winners'.

woman who headed the usher unit and died unexpectedly, the MC explained to the congregation,

We should look at today as a happy day. Death is a harsh reality. For when death doth come, we raise our hand up for God and say thank you. So we all have our part to play in this world... [on] a stage where we come to perform. After we have successfully performed our part, we have to go. So when death occurs in a family we do not question God... It is not a mistake.

Often, God's plan for each individual is articulated in terms of 'God's time'. For example, in CEPC/CHRISEM, 'Wait on God's time. When it is not your time, don't force it.'<sup>38</sup> And again,

You are struggling for marriage; it is not yet time for you to marry. You are in school, you know you are not ready to get a job, but you push anyway. Don't be like that! Don't eat your future before the time has come. You are crying for a million dollars to do something, and you can't even handle \$1,000! Relax and let God deal with you at the right time and purpose. Don't rush before the time, God will push you; if it is not time to come now, don't force it. If it comes, okay!

In all these churches, the story of Job is one of the most frequently evoked biblical stories; far more than stories of Jesus' preaching, Moses' leading his people to the Red Sea or Paul's conversion.<sup>39</sup> Believers are encouraged to 'be like Job' and to 'wait for God; don't give up, no matter how difficult your current situation'.

This message emphasising 'God's plan' is pervasive throughout the Pentecostal spectrum, in which a believer is assured that God wants him or her to have victory, but it may not always be in the manner or timeframe that the believer envisions. Of course, the idea that God has a plan for believers is not unique to Liberian Pentecostalism or even Christianity generally. However, this worldview is a central emphasis of Liberian Pentecostalism. It is addressed

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<sup>38</sup> CHRISEM Kakata revival, 'don't Let the blood speak', 24 October 2007.

<sup>39</sup> According to this story, Job was perfect in the things of God; all was well; he did nothing wrong. However, God took everything away from him and he was left in a state of total despair. Despite this, he maintained his faith in God, that it was 'his will'; eventually God saved his life and he lived happily, better than he did before.

perpetually and pervasively; most significantly, it stands out in its practical application to the wide variety of mundane problems in believers' lives.

#### **4.7 Solving Problems**

##### *4.7.2 Tapping into the power of the Holy Spirit*

A central emphasis of Liberian Pentecostalism is that with the help of the Holy Spirit, specifically through Jesus Christ, any problem can be overcome; equally important, using this benign power ensures that results will be lasting, and will not cause other problems. The churches often refer to 'power' explicitly when describing the ways spiritual imbalance can be affected. They all agree that while tapping into other sources of power may be effective in solving problems, doing so in essence dangerous and will eventually have negative implications. For example, at Winners':

What is power? Power is an ability to control and influence circumstances around you, in favour of you, in favour of your children, and that power belongs unto God. All powers – spiritual power, economic power, salvation power, belongs to God... When you are looking for financial powers, don't look up to the occult. Because when Satan gives you 200US he will take 2000US from you. The only power which will not fail, which has not failed, is the power of Jesus Christ.

Similarly, SUPC frequently describes the endless power of the Holy Spirit: 'When the power of God is with you, you are a different man... Doors will open because of this power.' The power needed for lasting solutions to personal problems – that is, to fight the lesser but very real power of Satan – can only be found within a 'Holy Ghost-filled church':

There are some who don't sleep at night because of fear! But if you have the Holy Ghost there is no reason to be afraid of the terror by night nor the arrow by day, nor the pestilence that walks in darkness, because you have the anointing and magnificent power of the living God... When you have the Holy Ghost you can challenge the powers of darkness and they shall not

prevail over you! God knows how to work it out! There is a need for the Spirit of God in your life! The Holy Ghost does not know about Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, and Catholics. If you open your heart and life He will come in! When you receive the Spirit of God you are thunder and lightning against the forces of darkness. When you strike with this power, hell trembles!

And at CEPC/CHRISEM:

The devil is strong, he has power over the non-believers, over the sinners, over the disobedient... Look at this world, [you see] he has power! But with the blood of Jesus you can have the power to do whatever you want, be whoever you want, there is no limit with the power of the Holy Spirit! You will overcome pain and suffering with His power!

It is abundantly clear to any visitor or member of these churches that the key to solving one's problems is tapping into the power of the Holy Spirit, which can solve any problem, and the solution will endure. Tapping into any other source of power will not solve the problem and, if it does, it will not be lasting and/or will bring in more problems soon after. Thus, a critical starting point for Pentecostals is learning the ways that this power is most effectively tapped.

The churches agree that the main way to tap into this power to be faithful and obedient – essentially changing the behaviour that caused demonic entry in the first place, as discussed in the previous section. Remaining faithful and obedient will not only ensure protection against future demonic attacks, but increasing faith and obedience will also enable a build-up of divine power to fight existing demons, as a pastor of Winners' told me quite explicitly in an interview:

If you have a problem, any problem, all it takes is faith, and you can solve that problem... Proper obedience is a necessity too, because if you disobey God, then he will take that power away... So faith, obedience, faith, obedience, these are the keys to your overcoming. Without this, you are powerless against Satan.<sup>40</sup>

In many cases, however, once Satanic influence has occurred, it is necessary for the believer to undergo 'deliverance', briefly explained below.

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with Pst. Philemon, Winners', May 2009.

#### *4.7.3 Deliverance*

Up to this point, we have seen that the churches are very similar in the ways they encourage believers to effectively tap into the power of the Holy Spirit in order to fight the devil, and defend themselves against his attacks: most generally through faith, obedience, individual and collective prayer. However, the churches vary significantly when it comes to the idea and process of deliverance for solving problems. Deliverance is, most generally, the process by which demons are cast out of individuals, thereby eliminating or significantly alleviating whatever problem that demon has caused. Most Liberian Pentecostals will understand deliverance in these terms; however, depending on the church under consideration, there is a variety of interpretations of what deliverance exactly is used for, when it should be used, and the proper ways in which to perform the ritual. All of the churches, though, agree with the idea that malevolent forces must be dealt with in order to alleviate certain problems.

#### *4.7.4 Giving*

Another common method encouraged by Pentecostals in order to secure blessings from God, certainly not atypical of Pentecostal and charismatic churches throughout the world, is by giving offerings and seeds; this is most commonly known as the faith-gospel, the prosperity gospel, seed-faith and the gospel of health and wealth.<sup>41</sup> This ideology is a fundamental part of the Liberian Pentecostal worldview, and is perpetually addressed in every service. An offering is something given ‘in kind’ to the church, and is a type of seed. A seed is something that can be given either to the church or another individual. The idea is

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<sup>41</sup> This is not to be confused with tithes, non-payment of which constitutes an act of disobedience and ‘robbing God’.

that if a believer sows a seed in ‘fertile soil’ – meaning a good church, or a good born-again Christian – then that seed will germinate and grow, and in the future (it could be tomorrow or in a few years) the believer will be able to ‘reap’ far more than was initially sown. That which is ‘reaped’ is not necessarily financial. An individual may reap health, a job or happiness as well – it is any blessing from God. Therefore, believers are perpetually encouraged to give, so that they shall receive blessings, that is, have their problems solved.

It is important to emphasise here that the explanations and solutions that focus on God’s role are usually combined with explanations and solutions that deal with the demonic aspect as well. It is safe to say that the figure of the devil, and the role of demons in causing or exacerbating problems in a believer’s life, is totally indispensable in all of these churches, and discourses surrounding the devil and evil are utilised in nearly every sermon, interview or casual discussion that is addressing personal and national problems.

#### **4.8 *The general role of Pentecostalism in Liberia***

Horton’s description of African religion – that it is ‘a system of theory and practice guided by the aims of explanation, prediction and control of space-time events’<sup>42</sup> – is still useful today and with respect to Liberian Pentecostals’ spiritual worldview. This description enables us to consider the adaptable nature of African religion, and its ability to perpetually incorporate new ideas, spiritual idioms and actions in order to address whatever events are faced. Examining the spiritual discourse and rituals that are utilised by a person or group of people which enable them to explain, predict and control a situation can indicate the major physical issues and pressures that affect their lives, especially those that

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<sup>42</sup> Horton, *Patterns*, 4.

they are otherwise powerless to control in any serious physical capacity. The forms these idioms take can thus vary widely, can adapt depending on the situation, can retain certain fundamentals, and can mean different things for different people at different times. As we saw in the literature review, there is no lack of scholarship describing the varieties of religious idioms used by people in Africa to articulate and act upon this-worldly events. There is increasing attention to Pentecostalism specifically, describing its appeal as based on the various spiritual idioms that it employs, yet within a constant and clear framework, as Robbins articulates most clearly:

This openness to local spiritual languages allows P/C [Pentecostalism and charismatic Christianity] to ... mean different things in different places... Yet even as it absorbs local content, P/C dualism also maintains its globally recognizable shape as a struggles between the divine and the demonic.<sup>43</sup>

This chapter has elucidated what these ‘local spiritual languages’ are in the Liberian context, specifically with respect to ideas of personal transformation and problem solving, by considering how they are used in typical circumstances that people are faced with in post-conflict Liberian life. We also saw how these ‘primal’ idioms were combined with Pentecostal idioms in order to account for the circumstances people faced.

The circumstances Pentecostals are faced with is a country still in ruins, but a ‘new era’ beginning, which is manifest as countless promises for development, peace, jobs, education and political stability. Hundreds of thousands were displaced during the war and most of them have found themselves settling in Monrovia where they lack community, resources and skills to survive as they could in rural areas, or when they were taken care of in refugee and displacement camps. Millions incurred profound trauma, either through partaking in, falling

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<sup>43</sup> Robbins, ‘Globalization’, 129.

victim to, witnessing or simply hearing about the massive violence during the years of war.

Despite vast improvements in peace and social stability, and a newfound sense of expectation and hope for the future, Liberians are mystified as to how, despite so much external help and internal guarantees and signs of growth among the elite, they are still suffering greatly. The huge influx of NGOs and UN programmes adds to the appearance of development work being done and resources being available, but the average Liberian sees few benefits. Things are being built but jobs are still lacking, short-term and low-paid. People want to ‘make it’, but do not know where to start and, even if they do, do not have the resources with which to do it. Everyone has a vision for himself or herself; in it they are successful, healthy, with a family and able to be the person that they want to be. To achieve this, they try to procure jobs, education and government help – things that were lacking during the time period research took place. In reality, then, in order to survive in such a climate, many people find themselves resorting to methods that they otherwise might not – crime, violence, prostitution, corruption and deceit – in order to survive. Others find themselves in stressful situations and act in ways that they otherwise might not – unable to contain their anger, grudges, or addiction. Many of these tactics and coping mechanisms were common during the war, when survival was the major objective for many. However, with peace, people no longer want to simply ‘survive’ by whatever means they can, but instead get ‘back to normal’ which means, most generally, stability and an end to struggle and suffering.

These spiritual idioms are also used to address public issues, contributing even more to their popularity. No other group in Liberia today is addressing the ‘spiritual component’ in such an open, clear and forward-looking way. Nor does

any other group have such a variety of explanations and methods of control for public issues, articulated using culturally relevant spiritual idioms that are situated within a legitimate analytical framework. Using this spiritual framework and its discourses, Pentecostals can understand and articulate the reasons that there is so little apparent social, political or developmental progress despite the obvious increases in attention and resources given to these efforts.

It is thus not surprising that Pentecostalism is popular in Liberia; certainly a major reason for its appeal is in its frequent use of spiritual idioms to explain this-worldly situations. This is especially relevant in Liberia where many people are uneducated, lack control over their situation, and are traumatised. However, this observation does not address the deeper issue behind the unique *way* Pentecostals use these spiritual idioms, and to what extent the *way* they use them contributes to Pentecostalism's endurance.

I argue that the spiritual idioms about personal transformation are so widely used and relied upon because they enable people to understand and deal with the issues that, in non-spiritual terms, are too complicated, out-of-reach, or painful to revisit head-on. Through these spiritual idioms, they are attempting to feel that they are in control of situations that are otherwise out of their hands. These idioms and actions are directly related to events that happened to them during and since the war; more specifically the difficulties they are faced with in post-conflict life in a country that is on its knees. The idioms used come from influences ranging from very far away – American Pentecostalism to very local – traditional Liberian worldviews. Anything in between is equally appropriate so long as it is situated within the general spiritual framework of good versus evil. Thus the Liberian Pentecostal worldview is best described *not* as a new way of looking at the world but instead, it is another manifestation of primal religiosity that seeks new

spiritual techniques to influence physical events. Thus, I suggest that Pentecostalism in Liberia is not the same as Pentecostalism elsewhere, and one should be careful about making generalizations about the role(s) of Pentecostalism around the world. Since it is so dependant upon indigenous and ‘primal’ ideas and practices, we must assume that this might be the same case in other contexts around the world.

This is necessary for Pentecostalism to be relevant for local populations; in this case, for Liberians, there are the indispensable beliefs that local spirits are dangerous and need to be dealt with, that witches are rampant across Africa and one needs to be vigilant to avoid their attacks; that curses affect everybody in Africa because the continent was ‘in darkness’ for so long. If these churches did not address these primal religious elements – Satan and his demons being the malevolent and unpredictable spirits – then they would be not be addressing what Liberians want out of religion. This partially explains why the mainline churches that never address these issues are dwindling in numbers – they don’t explain the whole problem.

However, it is the Pentecostal framework that makes this religion particularly powerful type of primal religiosity. Within this framework there is a common general goal to reorder the spirit world, which is the same spirit world that exists for anybody else in Liberia, so that victory is seen a common general method for achieving it – by tapping into the morally legitimate power of the Holy Spirit.

As the data presented in this chapter have shown, believers in every church are told that there are positive changes coming soon; that they, as Christians, have the power to be successful and improve their life and solve their problems. More than that, as Christians, they *should* be successful; if they are not, something is wrong. Despite this perpetually positive and forward-looking message, the reality of the

situation in Liberia is that very few changes are occurring for people; even if small improvements are noticed, they are by no means the Pentecostal ideal that people have set in their minds. As we have seen, one of the most common themes of Pentecostal sermons, prayers and conversations deals with the reasons that success, progress and changes have not come once a person has become born again, even if that person is a model of Pentecostal righteousness. So, one must ask how these churches manage to endure and continue growing in popularity despite this massive gulf between ideal and reality.

## ***CHAPTER FIVE***

### ***A practical worldview***

#### ***5.1 Introduction***

This previous chapter described the general role of Pentecostalism in Liberia: to help people make sense of the problems they face in their daily lives. It was argued that the particularly relevant aspect of Pentecostalism for Liberians came from the churches' combination of primal and Christian spirit idioms. It is this emphasis upon the primal religious elements, within a dualistic Christian framework, that attracts many people to these churches in the first place. However, it is important to consider the actual situation that many Liberian Pentecostals find themselves in despite their use of these idioms to help make sense of their problems: that these problems endure, get worse, or are replaced with new ones.

This chapter will make the point that within this generalised framework of good versus evil, and within the general ideas they have surrounding the conversion process, fighting Satan and appeasing God, Pentecostals have a huge repertoire of explanations and plans of action that can be employed when their problems are not solved by the more general spiritual strategies described in the previous chapter. As we will see, amongst all these explanations and plans of action, there arise various notions of agency and causality in *who* causes *what*, which contributes to evident confusion for many people trying to specifically understand what is going on in the spirit world, and how to properly act upon that knowledge. I will argue that the spiritual confusion contributes the enduring appeal of Pentecostalism because adherents can tap into endless explanations and methods in order to address their enduring problems. Thus the power of Pentecostal spirit idioms lies not only in the

attention they give to both primal and Christian worldviews, but also in that the spirit idioms are eminently practical, not doctrinal.

## **5.2 Unimportant theology**

### *5.2.1 Pentecostal leaders' alternative teachings and understandings*

We saw in the previous chapter that, while the churches have the same general spiritual worldview, each church has its own major theologies and doctrines that are generally emphasised only in brochures, personal interviews and occasionally in sermons. However, it is common for Pentecostal leaders within single churches to preach slightly different doctrine, emphasise different points, and in some cases, directly contradict their supposed doctrinal foundations.

For example, we saw in the previous chapter that Winners' doctrine clearly states that a person must consciously commit himself or herself to Christ – 'you must be convicted of your sin, surrender your life, and then you are born-again'. However, Pastor Solomon explained his own conversion quite differently:

I was a member and born into the Methodist church; a nominal Christian. But I had an encounter with Jesus Christ at Winners'... I first went to Winners' because I was chasing a girl. I wanted to have sex with her. We were working together and I said, 'at all costs, I must have sex with her'. She was a born again and I was not born again; I said 'no problem. I was following her to church, and after one day, during a drama presentation about the blood of Jesus, I got arrested [baptised by the Holy Spirit], and that is the end of it, I was a new man... and now I've got the light.<sup>1</sup>

This involuntarily 'arrest' was also sometimes described in church sermons, for example:

You might come to church, you might be here because you heard that Winners' get prosperity, they have success, but let me tell you, you will not be successful

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Pastor Solomon, WCI, 4 Dec 2007

until you are arrested by the power of the Holy Spirit, and no matter how much you fight the Holy Spirit and refuse to believe, just wait because one day He will take you and you will never look back!<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, CEPC/CHRISEM leaders described their becoming born-again not as a moment of surrender, but of being arrested or taken by God, as Sister Georgia described:

People used to minister to me, nothing happened, I didn't listen, I didn't care about God-business. But then one day, I read a tract. I had read it before and it didn't mean anything to me. But this time, it was different. Immediately, I was born again. God took me. I changed everything. Since then I am right with God, I know there is something for me, and I have never turned back... The devil has no power over me.<sup>3</sup>

Not only did leaders have ideas and accounts about spirit baptism that did not match their doctrine, but most members similarly had very little idea about their churches' doctrine regarding the matter. This is not surprising, considering many of these theological issues were hardly ever addressed in church sermons, meetings and classes.

#### *5.2.2 Pentecostal members' understanding*

If theological issues are discussed in any depth at all, this occurs during poorly-attended Bible Studies or during membership classes. Consequently, members are often totally unaware of or in disagreement with their churches' doctrines and how their churches' doctrines related to those of other churches. Everybody in these churches was familiar with the concept of being 'born again', and had similar ideas of what it meant: 'fully accepting Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour', or 'giving your life to God'; very few members volunteered further details. However,

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<sup>2</sup> Winners', 03 October 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Sis Georgia, CEPC, 20 June 2008.

when asked to give narratives of their own experiences of conversion, it became apparent that there were great differences between members, but these differences had nothing to do with their respective churches' doctrines.

For example, many members of both Winners' and SUPC admitted to having never spoken in tongues, yet were still certain that they experienced spirit baptism. For example, one member of Winners' explained, 'I have not spoken in tongues but I don't think that is important because I feel God inside me, and that is what makes me know that I am saved, that I have been baptised'. Another explained:

I don't really believe in tongue-speaking, I know they do it here but for me it is not important. I went to the membership class where they teach you to speak in tongues, and it did not come for me, and they said that I did not receive the Holy Ghost yet but I know I have... You cannot just teach someone to speak in tongues, if God wants to give it to you, He will.

Such differences were even starker in SUPC, where every member I spoke to who had not spoken in tongues still maintained that they were 'totally sanctified and filled with the Holy Spirit'. Many SUPC members also admitted, totally contrary to their doctrine, to having never been baptised in water but still spoke in tongues frequently. As one member explained when I asked 'what does it mean to be born again':

Well, it means that God has selected you to have the gift of tongues, which proves to you that you are saved, so when you have tongues then you can start to have faith in God.

If was also common for SUPC members to be unaware of what was unique about SUPC's Oneness Theology. When I asked one young man about why SUPC did not believe in the Trinity, he confusingly replied that, 'Well, we believe that the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost is what makes up God, but that Jesus came and was all these things, so we worship Jesus because he is God'. Most people, however, were

simply unaware that there was a theological difference between them and non-oneness Pentecostals.

CEPC/CHRISEM, while less doctrinal in the first place, still had members who articulated beliefs totally contrary to the fundamentals of the church: that in order to be born again and baptised in the spirit, one must first consciously accept Jesus and repent. Instead, many described moments of being arrested or taken, like the church leaders above had described. For example, one member explained to me that, ‘in order to be born again, you have to have hands laid upon you by a man of God who will fight the devil from you, then you will be saved’. Another explained that,

I got born again when I was at the crusade, I was there with my sister because she said there would be a good gospel band that night, so I went, I didn’t care about church at that point. But Rev. Dagadu went to the stage and started praying, and I didn’t even expect it but I just fell and shook and screamed and my sister told me that I had got born again. So, I started going to church from then.

Still another said that,

A true born-again Christian is a person who has received all of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. So many people out there say they are born again, and they do not have the power to heal, speak in tongues, any of this. Only a few people are really born again, so there is much work to do.

This is only a small sample of responses from members who were unaware or in disagreement with their churches’ unique doctrines. Especially considering the major differences between SUPC’s doctrine of sanctification and Winners’ and CEPC/CHRISEM’s doctrines, one might expect to see differences among members’ perceptions of their own sanctification. That there are no differences is an important point. When asked to comment on the doctrines of their church, people were not just unaware, but they demonstrably did not care about it – considerations of theology and subscribing to rigid doctrine is simply not in their worldview. They were primarily

focused upon the idea that the Holy Spirit had taken over, and that this takeover would cause a personal transformation.

### ***5.3 Personal transformation?***

We detailed in the last chapter the idealised vision of a Pentecostal lifestyle. The messages about personal transformation are perpetually preached in church; church leaders and pastors all conveyed the same sentiments in interviews without being prompted; most members of these churches would also agree on what is expected of them in terms of these issues. However, the reality is that many Liberians will hear these messages, maybe even work toward meeting that Christian ideal and encourage others to do so as well, but ultimately find it difficult or impossible to live according to them. Thus, in addition to the idealised Pentecostal lifestyle which is perpetually addressed, so is the act of ‘backsliding’, ‘transgressing’, ‘taking a vacation’, or ‘serving the devil’.

#### ***5.3.1 Transgressions***

Every sermon heard in Pentecostal churches has some reference to members’ sins, iniquities, lack of faith, immorality and disobedience; because of this constant attention to behavioural transgressions, one can assume that they are a relatively common, and to an extent an expected part of Pentecostal life. Very often believers’ transgressions are addressed very generally: ‘You come to church acting like you don’t sin, but God knows you sin!'; ‘You call yourself a born-again believer, but where were you last night?’, ‘A lot of people in the church try to be good Christians, but God knows what they do; they can’t get away with sin!'; ‘You gossip about non-

Christians and how immoral they are, but look at your own behaviour!'; 'Sin, sin, sin! You are all sinners! Maybe you gave your life to Christ but still you sin!'; 'The backsliding slope is a dangerous one; maybe it starts small, but before you know it you will be in the pit with the devil again!'

Additionally, the churches explain the causes of these transgressions, also often in general terms. In many cases, one can see a variety of potential causes for a believer's transgressions. For example, during one SUPC Sunday service, Rev. Benda explained the devil's role:

Disobedience is amongst us all as men. One of the weapons that the devil uses to put us against God is disobedience. Satan does not want us to obey; he makes us to not obey... Genesis 6 tells us how God closed the gates of Garden of Eden... The generation today is no different from the generation of Genesis Chapter 6... Now the devil compels us to disobey!

Later on in that sermon, however, he highlighted the believers' own free will in transgressing:

When God gets tired of us sinning, he will bring judgments, and these judgments are just... If you change your ways, God can change his mind... If you don't do what God wants you to do, the consequences will be dangerous... so make up your mind!

But then in closing he referred back to the demonic influences at work, this time in cooperation with human agents,

There might be somebody in your community, in your family, somebody who is involved with some witchcraft, and then you, if you are not strong in the things of God, then this witchcraft can affect you, it can make you backslide, it can make you doubt God, it can make you go back to the life of misery.

Such variety in potential explanations for a believers' transgression was a common feature in all churches, and not just when they were speaking vaguely and generally.

To demonstrate this, the following section will examine two of the most commonly addressed types of transgressions among all these churches: sexual

immorality and disrespectful and selfish behaviour. We will see the variety ways in which these transgressions are dealt with within a single church, in addition to highlighting some differences between them. It will become apparent that even a single type of transgression can induce many diverse explanations and responses. These idioms can range from those that are borrowed from traditional Liberian spiritual worldviews, to those that are based upon imported Pentecostal ideas. Therefore, when one considers the numerous transgressions that can occur, one can see the endless repertoire of spiritual idioms and actions that Pentecostals have to choose from when accounting for and attempting to correct their disobedient thoughts and behaviour. Within these choices, we will see, are also various notions of agency that are employed in order to account for and try to correct the individual's behaviour.

#### 5.3.1.1 Sexual immorality

Just a few examples of the ways CEPC/CHRISEM deals with sexual immorality indicate its huge repertoire of spiritual idioms. One head pastor told me a story that had taken place as he was just becoming a pastor two years earlier. He wanted a family but could not find a woman who would marry him because he was constantly having feelings of lust, which affected his relationships. He had been a serious born-again Christian for a decade, and after numerous unsuccessful deliverance sessions, Rev. Dagadu concluded that there must be a hidden curse in his family, and that he should go back to his home village and ask his relatives about any mysterious stories in the family's past. His grandmother told him a story about her grandmother, who was unable to conceive. She was constantly making sacrifices to the gods, going to her traditional religious doctors and asking them to give her power to conceive. One

day a strange man appeared to her and said that he would return the next day in a changed form, as a dog, and that she needed to have sex with the dog in order to conceive. She did as told, and became pregnant. She expected a human child, but instead she gave birth to a chicken. After that she was able to conceive normally and gave birth to healthy children. From that generation on, nobody had any problems conceiving unless they ate chicken or dog meat. After the pastor heard this story, he returned to Monrovia and told Rev. Dagadu, who concluded that the pastor was being afflicted by a curse brought about by this particular event in his family's history. Rev. Dagadu broke the curse and soon after, the pastor met a woman whom he married and has since had two healthy children. He admitted to sometimes feeling 'the spirit of lust' but in order to fight those feelings, he would simply 'get on my knees and pray to God to take the feeling away'.

Describing another method through which an affliction making a person feel lust, Rev. Dagadu told the congregation in a sermon called, 'An enemy from Satan's kingdom',

There are water spirits whose main purpose is to destroy the church, people who support church, Christian marriages... They are able to impart the spirit of lust, and that demon will manipulate you... So, women, if you have sex with a man [with a water spirit], the man is using you to pass on this demon of lust.

And during another sermon, Rev. Dagadu was directly addressing the 'demonic' Sande secret society, for which circUMCision is an indispensable part of the initiation<sup>4</sup>, when he explained that,

Female circUMCision destroys a woman's destiny, it will bring demons of lust and destroy her ability to get pregnant and get married because they have made a covenant with blood and dealing with the goddess of the water.

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<sup>4</sup> In Sande society, the clitoris is removed at the end of the initiation period. The belief is that if a female is not circUMCised, then she is not considered to be a woman and thus, will never be able to conceive.

Despite these graphic spiritual explanations and methods for eliminating a persons' lust, CEPC/CHRISEM also addressed the issues on a more mundane level. For example, in one sermon, Rev. Dagadu explained,

You are married and you have children, but you are here in church thinking about making love to another woman. That is called lust. That is wrong. Human nature, especially in men, it makes us have these feelings of lust but you, as a Christian, you have the power of the Holy Spirit to push down these feelings. It is not a demon, it is up to you!

This is not necessarily a contradiction; when I asked Rev. Dagadu about these two explanations for feelings of lust, he clarified that, 'In some cases, it is demonic attack, like when it keeps occurring, but before people just say it is a demon, they need to realise that maybe it is they who are at fault... It is complicated'.

Next, consider the various ways SUPC deals with immorality. In one sermon, Rev. Benda emphasised the individual's role in maintaining good moral behaviour:

As a Pastor, I cannot examine you. I don't know where you slept last night, I don't know what is on your finger, I don't know what you drank before coming to church. You have to examine yourself before God... Preachers are not law enforcers but rather, law interpreters. Therefore, we cannot hunt you to [make sure that you] live right in the sight of God; you have to examine yourself.

However, during prayer meetings, speakers would often refer to the 'devil's grip' over believers who were 'unable to stop my wicked ways'. For example, during one meeting, as a woman was being prayed for by all the pastors for 'lustful thoughts and having boyfriends', the assistant Pastors shouted,

Demon of Lust, I cast you out in Jesus' name, may the blood of Jesus wash her in purity and cleanse her soul of wickedness. I break the curse over her life; I break every wicked spirit over her life. Out! Out! Keep her away from bad influence; take her into your loving arms.

When I asked Sister Margaret after the service if such prayers were effective, she told me that, ‘Well, it might help, but sometimes these demons are stubborn, so she might need to do more deliverance, or we arrange private sessions. It depends’.

Winners’ Chapel most often highlights the individual’s free will when it comes to sexually immoral behaviour, which Pastor Solomon considers to be the second biggest problem in Liberia, after laziness:

The problems, they come from lack of understanding, as in John 1:19. Not from demons. So, when the Liberians understand who they are, and follow who they are and [follow the] demands of God, that is the solution.

One pastor teaching the Winners’ membership class, however, emphasised the spiritual component to morality:

There are Christians today that become born-again, but they go back to their old immoral ways and do the same things that they did before because their foundation is not solid and the devil can influence! Your life must be built upon the Word of God...if you live by this word, no principality or powers [demons] can get you or make you backslide. Satan knows scriptures; he will go for you now that you are born again... The devil is attacking you at this time so you must be strong because he wants to take you back!

#### 5.3.1.2 Treating others badly

A clear example of CEPC/CHRISEM’s various explanations and plans of action utilised to account for anger can be seen in Rev. Dagadu’s sermon to inmates during a prison revival. On day one, Rev. Dagadu went through the various reasons that the prisoners had found themselves involved in a life of crime in which, ‘the only person you care about is yourself’:

Many of you have lost track because you were tortured as a child...When you are rejected; people don’t like you, they call you criminals...the devil make you to feel like you’re not good so you behave like what the people have said to you.

But also, ‘The devil is using you... Do you know witchcraft is manipulating you... The medicine man is manipulating you, tricking you, and making you into a criminal, putting you in prison.’ And also, ‘Many of you are under curses’ and ‘Going to the medicine man brings demons into you; the demons ruin your life. Things start going bad in your life; they cause you to be angry, to fight, to be rude’.

He gave them a variety of approaches to change their lives so that they were less angry and selfish. First, he gave them a very practical approach:

When you discover who you are, you will recover... They told me I was good for nothing, but Jesus said ‘I am working for the one who has been rejected, outcast, confused’... You can make it, don’t be discouraged... Don’t stay with bad friends... Most of you are in prison because you refuse to control your anger... most of you are here because you can only see yourself. You are not the only one who suffers!

But this practical advice was also articulated in spiritual idioms:

You can be set free from the spirits that control you, make you do bad things. The power of God will let you release all these spirits, in the name of Jesus... Sometimes when you think you’re doing your best, it just gets worse. It’s not about you, its about what the devil is doing... stopping you, making you think God is weak, but we have a God who is able to take you from the bottom and bring you to the top... If you believe in that you will give your life to him... Whenever you call the name Jesus, things can happen... Your healing will take place, God will be restoring what the devil has stole. Do you believe it? I want you to sit and think of personal sin...we’re going to break those powers and then you will come to your senses; God will bless you... Did you know they release people because of their good behaviour – if you believe it then your behaviour will change in this compound.

During deliverance, Rev. Dagadu led the prisoners in prayer:

Satan, hear my voice. Nobody use me to do evil works... My life is good by the Word of God, so today, by the power of the Holy Spirit, I break your curse, over my life, over my bloodline, I break the curse over my destiny, I will never be bad again, I will be a good citizen, I will be a good person, I will think about others, I have Jesus, deliver me, set me free, physically, spiritually.

Here we can see how within a single service, Rev. Dagadu articulated that the prisoners were responsible for their own behaviour and needed to gain self-esteem

and respect in order to change, but also that there were all sorts of demonic influences that were causing them to misbehave, which could be eliminated with deliverance.

One sees similar responses within SUPC. For example, in one mid-week service Sister Margaret explained that:

Some of you come to church, do everything right, but you don't have a personal relationship with the Lord... You should go through the suffering of God... But Christ will change us, make us to stop being hateful, to stop being vexed.

During the women's meeting a few weeks later, Sister Margaret similarly preached about the believers' need to stop gossiping, being hateful, holding grudges, and being selfish. This time, she was explicit that every woman had a role in affecting her own behaviour:

You are a woman of God, you need to check yourself, check your speech, check your judgements on people. You need to be like Jesus, act like Jesus, would Jesus say bad things about your friend? Would Jesus get vexed with someone for some stupid thing? No! You need to check yourself!

During the mid-week service one hour later, however, she highlighted the devil's role in a believer's selfish and hateful behaviour:

Some of us are living in a world of sin, temptation, and we have a big knot in our heart... We take time to gossip, we use our eyes and mouth to gossip... Think about it! Your accusers are looking at you every day to find fault in you... These people are not doing it themselves, they are agents of the devil. The devil is using your head, your mouth, to commit this sin... An accuser talks about other people, don't be like that... Don't let the devil make you do be like that.

Thus, within the course of three services, Sister Margaret attributed these transgressions to direct Satanic influence, not allowing God to take over, and/or an individual's own free will.

There are other common transgressions that are frequently addressed in all these churches: inappropriate social activities, dishonesty and deceit, idolatry, skipping

church events, and not doing God's will. In dealing with each of these themes church leaders and members utilise a variety of spiritual idioms and, less often, mundane explanations to explain why they have transgressed, and what they will do in order to avoid such thoughts and behaviour in the future.

### *5.3.2 More faith is better*

Within all these explanations and plans of actions, there is one consistently legitimate recommendation: you need more faith. The churches are constantly pointing out that no matter the believer, there is always room for him or her to be 'more faithful, more obedient and closer relationship with Jesus'; nobody is perfect, so a person can never be complacent in his or her faith. Because of this, nobody is considered immune from the power that the devil might have over an individual, which might influence a person to act in ways that are not Christian. Even Rev. Dagadu admitted to being attacked by the devil, and having to act upon this to avoid being influenced:

One night, I was awoken in my sleep, I felt nervous, I felt a presence in the room. The devil was there sitting on the foot of my bed trying to get into me. I woke up my wife and we prayed together, we called out the blood of Jesus and that devil it disappeared from right there. But it was close.

He undergoes a special form of deliverance called 'cleansing' every week, for which he could rid himself of demonic influence that could 'sometimes make me feel weak, like I don't want to read my Bible, or don't want to pray, so I do the cleansing and it makes me renewed'. In another case, he explained how sometimes demonic influenced caused him to be impatient with people; thus when he or his wife noticed this, he would undergo a specific cleansing ceremony.

By contrast, Pastor Solomon and Rev. Benda considered themselves immune from these types of attacks by the devil because they were ‘too strong with the power of the Holy Ghost’. However, they did not consider themselves perfect by any means, and were certain that despite their immunity, Satan was perpetually attempting to gain access to their souls. If they were to backslide, they explained, the devil would easily be able to harm them because ‘all disobedience lets demons inside you’ and ‘those demons cause your behaviour to be even worse’. When I asked Rev. Benda specifically whether or not satanic influence could induce him to transgress, he explained that, ‘Before Satan influences a person, he has to gain access; that access is only granted if the person loses faith... I do not lose faith, so he will not affect me, ever’. Similarly, Pastor Solomon said, ‘People have problem, they blame demons. It is not a demon, it is their faith! Ok, the devil influences, but it is their fault first for not having enough faith. I never lose faith, God is always with me, God will not allow a demon to enter me!’

What each of these churches has in common is the idea that maintaining strong faith is an indispensable part of avoiding demonic influence, and that a person never has enough faith to be completely safe, always, but can be very good at avoiding attacks. At the same time, however, they both acknowledge that the devil is perpetually working against faithful Christians, in the hope that they might ‘slip’, enabling the devil to swiftly gain access. Thus, while faith in Jesus is considered to be the responsibility of the believer, there is also an element of external influence, whereby the devil can influence an individual to lose faith. With so many possible explanations that address the spiritual forces at work, it is important to address the

extent to which Pentecostals are less spiritually confused than before they became born again.

### *5.3.3 Acknowledging Confusion*

Just from the few examples given above, it is clear that in dealing with any single type of transgression, the churches have a variety of explanations as to why it has occurred, and even more recommendations for what the individual should do in order to stop such sinful thoughts and behaviour. In some cases, there were blatant contradictions. While there is a clear and dualistic general framework that underlies the Pentecostal worldview – good versus evil – little else is clear about what is going on in the spirit world. The outside observer is not the only one who perceives this; this lack of certainty and clarity was also felt by the church leaders themselves.

In CEPC and SUPC, pastors and leaders admitted that the specific spiritual explanations and solutions to problems was not always straightforward, and that sometimes it took a variety of approaches before something worked. For example, Rev. Dagadu told me in an interview that sometimes he is not sure if a problem is caused by the devil and requires deliverance, is natural and requires divine healing, or is natural and requires one's own discipline:

Yes, but sometimes it is hard to differentiate. Because Jesus said that 'I cast out the demons, the deaf and dumb spirit' and then the person gets healed and delivered. And Jesus sometimes casts out a spirit and the person gets healed; sometimes he lays hands and the person gets healed. So sometimes it is demonic influence or manipulation; other times it is sickness that can need direct healing... But then other times it is just a lazy person, someone who wants Jesus to be a magician.<sup>5</sup>

Even if it is certainly a spiritual problem, discerning the actual spirit at work can

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Rev. Dagadu, 10 June, 2008.

also be difficult for CEPC/CHRISEM,

This is why we have the deliverance form [that asks questions about your history]. I take it to your father, I start asking questions. Then I take it to your mother; maybe you won't understand why I'm asking these questions [but the reason is that it enables me to] see certain things [curses] in your family. Then I examine you from your birth; I start going through your dreams. With all of this information I will know whether the affliction comes from your father, your mother, your family or yourself.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, Sister Margaret of SUPC admitted that,

It can be difficult. Sometimes you don't know what you are dealing with.... So sometimes you pray and it takes a short time; some, they [demons in a person] take cover, they don't want to reveal the name of... what they are possessed of. So you have to minister, and pray and pray; sometimes you pray one day, then we leave it, and do it again another time. You know, the next day the person is more available, you keep doing it until the person is completely delivered. But sometimes you must try different things to know.<sup>7</sup>

Winners' pastors, by contrast, rarely admitted to 'not being sure' of the specific route to take with demonic influence. As Pastor Solomon told me in one interview, 'If someone is possessed, a simple prayer of faith, according to James, and anointing with oil... Once you are born again, all curses and demons are removed, and the devil cannot harm you'. In the same interview, however, he admitted to being a bit unclear in certain situations, and combined both primal and Christian ideas in explaining the problems:

We had one case where a woman in the choir, a long-time member, started causing trouble and not coming to practice. So we intervened, asked what the problem was. She said she had no problem, so we laid hands, anointed, prayed, and sent her away. The behaviour continued. We checked her tithing, she was okay there... We found out from her sister that she was visiting a spirit healer to try to get quick money. So we knew where the problem came from. We told her to stop seeing this juju man, she did and after that we saw improvement.

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Rev. Dagadu, 16 June 2008.  
<sup>7</sup> Interview with Sis. Margaret, 10 Jan 2008.

In all the churches, the Pentecostal spiritual discourse accounts for and, in a sense, expects this backsliding, transgressing and sinful behaviour. Still, members are perpetually reminded of their sinful behaviour, and told to change it, but there is always some type of explanation given for it, and some plan of action in order to address it, even though they all agree that ‘God has done everything for you and will do anything for you’. Whatever the message being preached, there is a fundamental acknowledgement of the possibility of ‘going back’ to one’s old ways, which the churches frequently remind their members is not the will of God and needs to be corrected. Although perfect moral and spiritual behaviour is idealised and situated within a clear and morally legitimate framework of good versus evil, Pentecostals do not believe that if they sin, even repeatedly, their salvation is lost or Jesus gives up on them.

#### *5.3.4 Spiritual explanations for transgressions*

The Pentecostal ideal envisions a lifestyle that ‘leaves bad behaviour behind’, but the reality of the situation is that this behaviour is very difficult to abandon completely even for those with a strong desire to do so. When their physical realities demand it, which they often will, the Pentecostal framework gives people a worldview in which to understand, excuse, and actively try to change their behaviour in future situations, while still enabling them to ‘transgress’ without guilt, self-loathing or considering themselves to have failed. There is no end to the spiritual explanations for these transgressions; there is never a time in which a Pentecostal is left without answers or plans of action to attempt to change his or her life in the way he or she wants.

The previous section described the complex spiritual idioms that are used that can arise – influenced both by the Pentecostal framework of Holy Spirit versus Satan and primal spiritual idioms – when Pentecostals were faced with accounting for personal transgressions. The following section will provide more specific examples, situated within their physical contexts, to describe some of the ways Pentecostal idioms of spiritual transformation gave people a feeling that they could deal with issues that they were otherwise too powerless to change, too uninformed to fully understand, or too traumatised to even speak about. Let it be clear that I will *not* be arguing that these idioms *did* help them deal with issues, but that the reason they were used was to *try* to deal with them. The implication of these attempts will be dealt with in later chapters.

#### 5.3.4.1 Sexual immorality

K, a friend's housekeeper, is a young woman who has been a long-time member of a large Pentecostal church. Like most members, she was adamant that its members adhere to certain moral standards that 'glorify God'. When I would ask about her church, K talked about how much she loved it, how her life changed when she 'got born again', how serious she was to live a Pentecostal life, prayed many times a day, how God has blessed her and how she often read her Bible. She claimed to go to church events frequently, never missed a service, and evangelised her friends and 'door to door'. By appearances, she was the devoted and serious Christian who represented this Pentecostal ideal of moral and spiritual behaviour. After getting to know her better over the course of a few weeks, and since she knew my friends very well, she began to reveal more about her personal life to me. Ultimately, I learned

that she had a long-term boyfriend who was living in Ghana at the time, whom she rarely saw, though she had a three-year-old child with this man, whom she was raising with the help of her mother. She wanted to marry him but there were few indications that it would happen soon because, as she said, ‘He is not serious now’. Meanwhile, K had another ‘boyfriend’, an older American who had been residing in the country as a private contractor for the past few years. K would visit him whenever she needed money or material goods; she was not a prostitute, but he was her Western ‘sugar daddy’, something the Pentecostal churches often explicitly preached against. I asked K how she felt about this relationship, and what the church said about it. She explained that yes, of course she knew it was wrong, but that if she did not have this man, then she would not have enough money to support herself and her child. ‘I am praying to God for things to get easier’, she said, ‘so I can see this man never again’ and that ‘it is wicked, but the devil can tempt me with money like that. How can I not take the money?’ Despite this relationship, she was ‘a new person’, since ‘Before I was born again, I gave my body to any man for a bottle of beer. Now, I know that my body is not for money, but what can I do?’

#### 5.3.4.2 Inappropriate social activities

Another friend, M, was a missionary, pastor and self-described ‘apostle of Jesus Christ’ who had devoted his life to ‘spreading the gospel in the Muslim dominated areas’. He would often quote the Bible, testify to ‘the glory of Jesus’, and speak to anybody who would listen about the need to ‘be born again’. He always testified to the importance of adhering to moral standards, but on one occasion, he admitted to me that a few weeks prior, he had been with friends and ‘drank plenty bottles of

beer'. I asked him if this was okay in the sight of God and he told me, 'No, it is a sin, but sometimes my head is too full and I need to get away, the devil compelled me, and I could not stop drinking'. The next day, he 'prayed to God to give me the strength to fight these things'. Before M was born again, he was a combatant who was violent, used drugs, womanised and 'did not know the difference between right and wrong', but 'by the grace of God I have been taken way from that wicked life'. Still, it was clear that he was still traumatised by what he went through during the war, something he very rarely spoke about, and would have long moments where he stared at the ground, was unresponsive and clenched his fists. The use of drugs and alcohol among ex-combatants is well documented, and is often cited by ex-combatants themselves as the only thing that keeps them from 'think think' too much.<sup>8</sup> Although M had almost totally abandoned this lifestyle, it was still sometimes too difficult for him to cope with daily life without resorting to his old ways of dealing with stress.

#### 5.3.4.3 Dishonesty and deceit

In another situation, an ex-research assistant, E, who like the others claimed to be a serious born-again Christian, had been attending CEPC since he was a child. After a few months of working with me, he had become very lazy and irresponsible; after countless warnings, I told him that I wouldn't be needing his help any more. He was being paid very well by Liberian standards, and I had often given him extra money for clothes, food and other things he needed. One week later, I received a call from

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<sup>8</sup> Sharon Abramowitz, *Psychosocial Liberia*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Harvard University, 2008.

the Ministry of Labour who had received a complaint from him that I owed him \$600US in unpaid salary. We met with the counsellors, who listened to both of our stories, while E told a series of lies that were quite obvious to those hearing the stories. The issue was resolved, without E ever telling the truth, and weeks later I got a call from him crying, apologising and saying that he felt so bad for doing what he did, but that his family pressured him into it and threatened to throw him out of the house if he did not get money from me. I verified this claim with his family who told me, ‘This is Liberia, we had to try something because you’re a white woman’. What he did to me, he explained, was ‘his old self coming back true’. He then assured me that he was going to church more often, was going to go through deliverance to ‘change my bad behaviour like what I did to you’. Before E was born again, he roamed around West Africa as a refugee, stealing from people who had taken him into their home and supported him. He’d often told me about how he was happy he left his ‘old life’ but that sometimes it was hard to ‘stay good’ because life was ‘too hard’ as an honest boy amongst thieves and liars.

#### 5.3.4.4 Treating others badly

In another situation, a good friend of mine, T, was a serious member of Bethel World Outreach church. He was the head usher, lived with his pastor who had taken him in during the war, attended every church event, was constantly reading his Bible, and consistently evangelising people who came to his scratch-card stand. When asked about his faith, he would get incredibly excited and start giving testimony after testimony, looking into the sky and yelling, ‘God is good’. He was serious that he was always living ‘according to God’s will’, and often recounted the type of

behaviour that was expected from him as a good born again Christian. One Sunday, the Liberian football team had a qualifying match – the first game in the new stadium and it was a major event. T insisted on taking me, since, ‘they can be too rough, you will be hurt’, and that we should skip church to get to the game early. He claimed that although his usher duties were important, there was nothing that could make him miss this football match. Arriving at the packed stadium three hours before the game, where eleven people died of being crushed or heat exhaustion before kick-off, T insisted that we fight our way forward to find somewhere to sit. At one point, some very drunk men were shoving us forward. T turned around, cursed at them wildly, shoved them back and the encounter erupted into a small fight with a number of ethnically-based insults. When things calmed down, I said to T, ‘Wow, I’ve never seen you get angry’ and T shook his head and said, ‘Sorry, this is Liberia, the devil can be too strong, you have to be like that or they can embarrass you. They can make me so vexed. Forget it’. He later explained that before he became born-again, he would get drunk and start fights, was always angry, and had girlfriends whom he treated badly; some he abused. But, ‘God took me from all that, now I can be good most of the time, but sometimes it is too difficult, I pray for God to protect me from those wicked ways’. The reality of the situation was that the only way to deal with those men was to act as T did; he accounted for his behaviour by attributing it to the devil compelling him to act like his ‘old self’.

#### 5.3.4.5 Skipping church

I knew well a few individuals who had been active members in their Pentecostal church when they were refugees in Ghana, and soon after they returned to Liberia in

2003. By 2007, they began skipping church and would spend their time instead watching television, drinking gin and playing scrabble or checkers. Still, they claimed to be born-again Christians but going through a period of ‘backsliding’. They attributed their skipping church to high transport prices, but also, ‘sometimes the devil can make me too tired, I can just sleep all day. The devil stops me from attending’. Because they had stopped going to church, their bad behaviour and demonic afflictions had increased and they also argued that, ‘God is angry with me because I am disobedient, and so he is taking my blessings away’. In order to correct their behaviour, they matter-of-factly stated that they ‘needed deliverance’ so that they could get back on track. However, when I asked if they were planning on doing that soon, they said, ‘No, the devil is too strong now. I will wait until God opens a door to make me to be good again’.

#### 5.3.4.6 Not doing God’s will

Reverend Dagadu had an exhaustive knowledge of ‘demonology’, much of which he had read in books and heard in video and audio cassettes. For the demonology that dealt specifically with Liberian spirits, though, he considered himself a specialist who knew things nobody else did, and that part of his particular role as God’s servant was to reveal his knowledge to Liberians: ‘God put me here and gave me this ministry so that I could tell everybody about the dark world... God has told me many things, he has given me experiences where I looked the devil in the eyes, and now it is my job to tell others’. Although he shared this knowledge with his congregations regularly, and sold cassettes where he talked about these things, he also had plans to write a book about them – ‘God told me to write a book about this’. He’d secured the funding to

purchase a laptop so that he could begin typing this book, but, as he told me, ‘The devil is stopping me from doing it’. When I asked more specifically about what it was the devil was doing, he told me, ‘I am just lacking the motivation. I go to write, and nothing comes. The devil can attack me like that. So, when the time is right, the book will come’. In a similar incident, I was asked to produce the ministry’s monthly newsletter, a single-page pamphlet that would give testimonies, news, announcements, Bible readings and a small ‘pastor’s corner’ in which one of the pastors would write a small message. I produced the newsletter in a few days, and asked the leaders if one person could supply me with this ‘message’ by the end of the month. Nobody gave me anything; when I told Rev. Dagadu that I would wait to print the newsletter until I got a submission, he told me that, ‘You see, the devil is keeping us from production. We cannot give you anything, so we need to pray on it and try to make the devil to stop interfering with our plans’.

#### *5.3.5 The practicality of spiritual idioms*

Despite their periodic transgressions, all these individuals still claimed to have undergone major behavioural changes upon becoming born again, and each of them attributed their new life to the messages they repeatedly heard in their Pentecostal church about their being ‘transformed’ because of the blood of Jesus, God’s grace, or the love of the Holy Spirit. In each of these situations, when asked for details about the reasons they had transgressed, the devil was always brought up as having ‘too much power’ over Liberia generally and one’s life individually. The way that each of these people tried to deal with these problems was to ‘pray to God to make things

better, so that these behaviours can't happen anymore', 'tell God I'm sorry', or, in more serious cases, 'undergo deliverance'.

These examples have showed that strictly adhering to the Pentecostal ideals can in practice be impossible, given Liberia's current situation. To account for these difficult realities, where a mundane understanding or response is not practical or obvious, spiritual idioms were employed and spiritual action was taken. When there were opportunities to address the situation in this-worldly terms, or articulate it in this-worldly terms, this was done as well. Each informant was fully aware of the physical realities of Liberia which kept them from fully behaving in the way that they 'knew' was right; however, they were also fully aware of their relative physical powerlessness over the situation, and the fact that in order to survive, deal with it, or cope with it, spiritual explanations and solutions were necessary.

#### ***5.4 Solving problems?***

Pentecostals are clearly concerned with solving problems, whether personal or public; however, the reality of life in Liberia is that very few of these problems are actually solved. Pentecostal spiritual discourse accounts for this reality. We saw in Chapter Three that there are a variety of potential explanations that Pentecostals utilise in order to understand and articulate the sources of their personal problems in addition to wider public concerns; there is not a simple assumption that all bad comes from Satan and all good comes from God. A single problem can potentially be the result of a satanic attack, a punishment from God or lack of blessings from God, or part of God's plan. There are also various notions of agency employed here; often, the believer is told that he or she has some sort of role in bringing these problems

upon himself or herself, through disobedience, lack of faith or not glorifying God sufficiently. At the same time there are some situations in which the devil has control over an individual's thoughts and behaviour, causing personal transgressions. These can lead to more demonic entry, which leads to being less in control of oneself, leading to more demonic entry and more problems, and so on. Added to this is the possibility that a person is afflicted by generational curses, providing entry points for demons through ancestor's activities three generations prior.

Taking all these potential causes together, we can see how the believer is never totally certain about the source of his or her spiritual, and thus physical, problems. Neither are people totally certain about why it is that Liberia has suffered so much, and continues to suffer. Despite this, whatever the perceived source of their problems, as the next section will show, Pentecostals are totally clear that the only legitimate source of control for their situation comes from the power available to them by tapping into the Holy Spirit. Similar to Pentecostals' explanations for the source(s) of their problems, within this general certainty that the 'Holy Spirit can solve anything', there is a variety of methods used to try to effectively solve a problem.

#### *5.4.1 Multiple solutions*

We have seen above that elucidating the spiritual source of a personal and public problem is complex and uncertain. This section will show how the specific methods used to effectively tap into the power of the Holy Spirit and utilise it to solve these problems are similarly complex, varied and adaptable. It will be seen that there are some significant differences in the ways the churches approach spiritual problem-solving, but all are ultimately based on the same fundamental ideas of spiritual

causality and spiritual methods of control. In order to solve spiritual problems, spiritual power must be utilised; this power will ultimately come from either good or evil sources; however, it is only the power of the Holy Spirit that Pentecostals see as a morally legitimate and long-term solution to their problems. After thematically going through all of the methods for problem-solving, we will see that when problems are not effectively solved or improved, despite using a variety of spiritually legitimate methods, there is never a point at which there are no other possible solutions. Instead, believers can revert back to a number of other possible spiritual explanations, which open the door to even more spiritual solutions. Despite this perpetual spiritual disorder and confusion that believers acknowledge when trying to solve their problems, they can always refer back to the legitimate Pentecostal framework that provides them the certainty that the type of power they should tap into is that of the Holy Spirit.

When a believer has spiritual power, there are a variety of ways that he or she can use it to solve problems. As will be seen believers are faced with an endless and complex array of choices in how to most effectively tap into the power of God and then how to most effectively use that power once it is obtained. More than that, believers are always reminded that there is more spiritual power to access; if a solution has not come, then it is possible that not enough spiritual power was utilised: a person's faith can always grow; a person's obedience can always be improved. Still, believers are given the clear, dualistic spiritual framework within which they can situate all these possibilities. In many examples, the prescribed solution to a personal problem is dependant upon its perceived source, whether it is Satan (in his attacks) or

God (as a punishment or part of His plan). First, we will consider the many ways that a believer is advised to deal with perceived attacks from Satan.

#### 5.4.1.1 Individual prayer and declarations of dominion

Often, this type of spiritual warfare can be effective in simple declarations or demonstrations of faith, including individual prayer, which the churches regularly encourage their believers. For example at Winners', 'There is power in your mouth. You can say it and see it... You see the devil, you say 'Go' and he goes'; 'Praise is the weapon God has given to every believer to fight the devil';

As a Christian, you can rid yourself totally of sickness and disease by exercising your authority over Satan, the force behind every sickness. Testimonies abound this week to prove the efficacy of the believer's authority over satanic affliction... Now, God has given you dominion over everything He created.

Winners' frequently highlights how prayer is enhanced when a believer is anointed with oil, as in this testimony:

I stand to testify to the goodness of the Lord in my life. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of February, 2008, a dog bit me in my dream When I woke up, I discovered that the same spot the wild dog had bitten me in the dream had blood stains... I went to one of my aunties for help and we prayed together about it. The following day, I went to the pastor who anointed my hand. During the Wednesday service, the pastor said that whatever the enemy had planted in us would go out. I recognized that as my word. When I got home I was led to praise God and I denounced Satanic oppression in my body. To the glory of God, today there are no more pains in my hand!

Similarly, at CEPC/CHRISEM: 'Every time you say the devil is a loser, the power of God is released! Demons are overcome!'; 'Demons run away at the name of Jesus'.

Also, at SUPC, 'You have the power of the Holy Ghost the devil cannot touch you! You pray the blood of Jesus, you scream the name of Jesus, and the devil will run away from your place, you will receive your healing with the name of Jesus!' ; 'If

you are suffering, lost, hurt, sick, tell the devil that you are done with him, in the name of Jesus, and you will leave your problems behind'.

Problems affecting Liberia can also be effectively combated through individual prayer and declarations of dominion over Satan. Consider the following typical solutions given by Pentecostal members with regards to some of Liberia's problems:

[In Liberia] there are problems from the dark world. The devil is among us and he gives the church problems, he gives the country problems so we must fight... We are fighting! But we need to increase our strength, and the time we spend to pray, like more tarries and revivals would help.

There are dark things in the government, corruption, lies... They have been infiltrated by the devil... So all we can do is pray that the government begins to receive Christ and then also to pray that the devil will be overcome in the government because he is there to bring us down.

In Liberia we are facing hardship, evil, wickedness... If the Liberians can come closer to God and love each other, then we will be blessed, so to do this we need to pray for our country so that we can change from our wicked behaviour and become closer to God... It is a fight that we as Christians cannot ignore.

The devil is everywhere, hurting the country. We are involved in a battle... The church must help Liberia.... When a person comes up in Christ then they are suited to help Liberia in the spiritual and the physical... We have little money, so for now it can only help by praying, constant prayer. We need to pray for our leaders to do the right things for the country. Prayer will make anything happen.

It is typical for prayers to be made for Liberia and its leaders in weekly services. Generally, these prayers allude to 'fighting the demons' or 'bringing down the forces of Satan in order to solve problems. Prayer for politicians is particularly important. In 2007 President Johnson-Sirleaf was a guest at SUPC; the entire service was broadcast on the national radio station at the time and then repeated the following Easter Sunday. After she gave a short testimony in which she asked SUPC to continue praying for the country, Head Pastor Benda and other leaders circled around her, laid

their hands on her; everyone in the congregations stretched out their hands towards her. Rev. Benda led the prayer:

We pray for Madam Sirleaf that you give her comfort and strength, we pray for divine government... We pray down the forces of evil and bring down the power of the Holy Ghost, let Liberia feel His divine presence and push all wickedness aside.

After this prayer, at least one minute was devoted to intercessory prayer, while everyone in the audience shouted prayers towards her and Rev. Benda spoke in prayer language and continued to ‘cover Madam Sirleaf with the blood of Jesus’ and ‘invoke the Holy Ghost fill her soul’.

This visit was incredibly important for SUPC members; all of them proudly pointed out that she had visited whenever I asked them about Liberia and the government. Not only did they consider her visit evidence that she thought their spiritual work was important, but it also enabled them to partake in direct spiritual intervention with her and, by implication, the country:

[When the President came] the spirit was strong in the church! It was good for Liberia... When Pastor Benda laid hands, any demons [that were trying to affect her] they just went... She is a great president and the Holy Ghost is with her. It could be more but [now] there is some.

#### 5.4.1.2 Intercessory prayer against demons

There are also designated settings and times for members to gather together for spiritual warfare. Prayer meetings are a common weekly event within Pentecostal and charismatic churches, during which believers engage in intercessory prayer, normally guided by one or two leaders who direct the prayers towards a specific demonic affliction or influence, and then allow believers a few minutes to pray out loud against it, in his or her own words. These meetings are very enthusiastic; normally

believers walk back and forth through the aisles, raise their arms, shout out and clap. This is also an occasion for people to speak in tongues; while not all do, it is a completely typical occurrence. Normally, all of these prayers stop when the intercessors begin speaking again, although in some cases individuals continue yelling out, clapping or jumping and are attended to individually by another member until they are silent and in some cases, they are escorted out of the room.<sup>9</sup> At most of these meetings, fasting and/or anointing with oil is encouraged because, as with individual prayer, it is believed to enhance one's access to the power of the Holy Spirit and therefore make the prayers more efficacious.

These prayers can be directed towards helping a specific individual or group of individuals who are facing personal problems, though there is also time during which individuals can pray for themselves. The idea is that collectively, Pentecostal believers are able to more effectively harness the power of the Holy Spirit; when many believers are doing this together, the physical environment is 'safer' to embark on this spiritual warfare and thus is more effective at removing demonic influences.

These prayer meetings also address social and political problems that are affecting much larger groups and in some cases, Liberia as a whole. Consider a typical intercessory prayer during a Winners' mid-week service:

We are breaking every demonic stronghold over this country, we are rebuking the demons that have infiltrated the Executive Mansion, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Finance, the schools, the hospitals, we rebuke you, we rebuke you, this is not your country this is God's country! Pray, pray, pray, pray!

Similarly, at an SUPC mid-week service, the assistant pastor began the

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<sup>9</sup> In one case at an SUPC prayer meeting, a woman collapsed after praying enthusiastically and was unresponsive. She was carried out of the main chapel and attended to by two other women in the church, while the intercessory prayer continued inside.

intercessory prayer by explaining that,

The crime in this country is too much, so today we are going to pray against the devil that is causing all these armed robberies... I know you have your own problems at home and with job, but today, we need to embark on specific spiritual warfare to stop this plague of armed robbery in the country... It is up to us, the government and police. Not even the UN are stopping it. So today church, forget your own problems and we will help Liberia.

CEPC similarly considered intercessory prayer hugely effective in fighting larger Problems, as Rev. Dagadu explained to me in an interview:

So the crusades can help people to see what Christ can do to the devil and so they will decide to give their lives... but the spiritual warfare we do on crusades also defeats so many demons and forces of darkness in the area that we have a great effect just by being there... Satan is afraid to go there... In one situation, we had a crusade and the place had no rain, the crops were failing, the wells were dry, but we prayed for it, located the demon, cast it out and that night, the rain came.

During normal church events and meetings, it is common to hear messages that ‘There is an assignment that God has placed in your hands; the power you have is enough to change a nation!’ and ‘Those that are praying are few, so the warfare in heaven relies on those few’. CHRISEM crusade director Deacon Butler explained more specifically:

[Now] we are getting God to come to the rescue of Liberia through our prayers, deliverance, teachings, crusades, where people receive healing but we also pray for the country to receive healing, and it is working... We have little financial support, but still there is a great impact, while INGOs and the UN have plenty of money but are making only a small change... But we work on the spiritual, which is a critical part. Without the spiritual there is darkness, so we are needed, but we need to increase our strength, increase our battle, so the effect is more strongly felt.'

Situations in which individuals are clearly undergoing experiences in which they somehow ‘lose control’ are normally observed during deliverance, a critical aspect of Liberian Pentecostal churches to which I now turn.

#### 5.4.1.3 Deliverance

Winners' conducts deliverance in a very general sense, that is, they pray over groups and individuals with the purpose of removing demonic influences. Winners' leaders do not think they need deliverance rituals to consist of anything more than group or individual prayers, fasting, and perhaps the use of anointing oil. Even if a person is totally possessed by a demon, as pastor Solomon told me, all that is required is 'a simple prayer of faith, according to James, and anointing with oil... and the demon will be removed'. Pastor Solomon stressed that it was 'demonic' for a ministry to 'name the demon and remove it'. Instead, he explained, as long as a person remains obedient after an effective prayer of deliverance, all demons will be gone and they will stay away.

However, if a person transgresses, especially by not paying tithes, demons will come back, and will not leave until tithing continues:

With financial crisis, a lot of people will come with their financial crisis and everything they say that it is witches but it is not witches. 99% discover that they are open for attack because they don't pay their tithe. So we do deliverance, it is the area of finances... We show them when you don't pay your tithes, you give room for devil. When devil attacks, he can touch your finances, when you pay your tithe, then you are putting yourself under coverage.<sup>10</sup>

Winners' generally performs these group rituals of deliverance, consisting of relatively vague statements like, 'In the name of Jesus the power of the devil will leave you today' or 'You have dominion over the forces of darkness, you will rid yourself of the devil right now!' Such declarations are common during normal church meetings, and are usually given before or during the praise and worship period and

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Pastor Solomon, 4 December 2007.

again after the sermon. One Sunday each month members bring in their own oil, anoint themselves, and similar prayers for deliverance are offered after the sermon.

However, contrary to his assertion that deliverance rituals for specific problems were unnecessary and even ‘demonic’, in the same interview Pastor Solomon explained that he would conduct these types rituals if congregants asked for it. The procedure was that he would first interview the person to determine more about the problem, and what transgression might have caused it in the first place, and then pray with the afflicted individual. In some cases, oil is used to enhance the efficacy and after this ‘simple prayer’ is offered by the pastor to ‘release’ the person from demonic affliction. During one ritual, as Pastor Solomon explained, ‘After I made my prayer for the demon to be released, the woman experienced the manifestation... A fish came from her private parts. That is what Satan can do to you... That was the demon inside of her’. While this type of deliverance was certainly not often talked about in sermons, nor were these types of manifestations typical of a Winners’ service, they were typical and expected during SUPC and CEPC/CHRISEM services.

SUPC performs group deliverances on Wednesdays during their prayer meeting, at their crusades, and in private by appointment. All deliverances are attended by at least two prayer warriors, and sometimes one of the head pastors. During group deliverance at the prayer meeting, sometimes individuals were singled out to tell the congregation their problem and their general background, and the congregation would hold their arms towards that person while the prayer warriors anointed, laid hands and prayed loudly. Usually this person would ‘manifest’ in some way – fall on the ground, scream, cry, clap or thrash violently. After one of these deliverances, or if there is not one to be singled out that day, those requiring deliverance are asked to

come to the front, where a general prayer is said, then each individual prays loudly while prayer warriors and pastors pass through, laying hands on everybody for a few minutes at a time, praying out loud, and anointing with oil. Most people clap, scream, cry or fall to the floor during this time; sometimes people thrash violently and need to be attended to by ushers looking on.

For the private deliverances, according to Sister Margaret, the person needing deliverance would simply make an appointment with the head pastor, talk to him about his or her problems, and a short interview would be conducted to determine what, exactly, the spiritual source of the problem was. Then, a time would be arranged for that individual to be attended to by pastors and prayer warriors, and the deliverance would begin. A personal deliverance can last anywhere from ten minutes to three weeks, depending on the problem and the demon being dealt with, as Sister Margaret explained:

You cannot really give a time frame... When they [demons] are in a person, sometimes they are very stubborn... A person may be possessed by more than one demon... Sometimes [members] get complete deliverance... Sometimes you pray [for them] and it takes a short time; some [demons] take cover and will not reveal their name [which is needed for the Pastors to pray the demon out]. So you have to minister, and pray and pray, in some cases you need to pray today, and then stop [and continue] another time... until the person is completely delivered.

She further explained that, once a person is delivered, demons can re-enter and continue to cause the same or new problems:

Because if you are delivered, Jesus said, when the spirit leaves a body, the spirit will go around, and after some times, it will come to check whether the place is left... whether that place he left has been occupied by Christ. So if it is not occupied, the spirit will come back and see the place clean [of demons], but it is still empty [of the Holy Spirit]. Then the Bible says there will be seven demons, all stronger than the ones who left before, and they will come in and repossess [the person]. So when you are delivered, you must be saved. [Christ] must occupy that vacant place where the demon left because if not, the demon will

come back and it will be more than one. Your latter stage will be worse than your former stage.

While rituals of deliverance are an indispensable aspect of SUPC's beliefs and practices, it was not common for the subject to be the focus of a Sunday sermon. Instead, it would be alluded to in the context of another sermon, or would be only addressed in detail during smaller meetings and interviews.

In this respect, SUPC and Winners' are very different from CEPC/CHRISEM, which undoubtedly devotes the most attention to combating the power of the devil through deliverance at crusades, revivals, conferences, prayer meetings, in private and in some Sunday services. Most of their crusades are designed specifically to 'spread the message of Jesus through deliverance' and are often advertised as a 'deliverance crusade'. People from all varieties of the Christian spectrum attend these events and undergo group deliverance, which is conducted at the end of the service, usually for four out of six nights of the event. During this time, the speaker will first have an altar call, during which new converts will give their life to Christ; old converts who have been backsliding have the opportunity to 'rededicate'. After this, those who 'have any problem', and who are 'born again in Christ', even if they only became born again the moment before, are asked to come to the front so the pastor can 'pray with you'. During this time, nearly everybody in the audience will spill forward. The congregants are told to put their hand on the place that is affecting them – if the problems are emotional, hands on head; barrenness, hands on uterus, etc. Then they are told to repeat a prayer until suddenly the pastor yells, 'Loose!' and begins speaking in 'prayer language', which they describe as a specific form of tongues that is imparted only to individuals who have the 'gift' of performing deliverance. During

this time, intercessors, ushers and prayer warriors are walking through the congregation to lay hands on some people, pray with them, or if someone begins to manifest, which is quite common during these events, they will catch them, call over other workers, and carry them to a tarpaulin placed on either side of the stage to continue manifesting in a secure location. The prayers last about fifteen minutes; when they are finished, a benediction prayer is said, and then everyone is dismissed. During this time, most people who have been manifesting on the tarpaulin will have finished, and stand up and leave; others will remain until the ushers begin cleaning up and need to pack the tarpaulin. Similar rituals take place during small revivals, conferences, and daytime ‘deliverance sessions’. Very rarely, deliverance would be performed at the end of a Sunday worship service, and if it was, it was nowhere near the same energy-level as those of the other events. For those who belong to CEPC/CHRISEM, the proper place to go for deliverance is one of the revivals or crusades put on by the church or, in more serious situations, the CHRISEM deliverance clinic

#### 5.4.1.4 The CEPC/CHRISEM Deliverance Clinic

The main distinguishing feature of CEPC/CHRISEM is its full-time Deliverance Clinic. The clinic operates out of the CHRISEM office on one of Monrovia’s main roads. The ministry is very well known throughout Monrovia due to their frequent crusades and a radio programme that Rev. Dagadu’s periodically broadcast. The deliverance clinic is specifically devoted to handling cases for people who want personal deliverance for specific problems, as opposed to group deliverance as offered at crusades, prayer meetings or other services, which generally do not focus

on a single individual or on a specific problem or demon. The deliverance ministry attracts people from all types of churches – mainline, Pentecostal, Seventh Day Adventist and others – throughout Monrovia. The importance of personal deliverance, Rev. Dagadu told me, is that it is ‘more complete, more serious’.

The process is very structured and organised. On Mondays, people are told to come between 9 and 12 am to ‘fill out the form’. Clients are taken on a first come first serve basis, unless the client is a pastor of any church, or a member of CEPC, in which he or she is moved up to the top of the list. Every client arrives, goes to the office to pay 300LD (\$5US) for ‘the form’; they get a receipt and then write their name down on a list on the patio of the office. They then wait for anywhere from ten minutes to three hours, depending on the number of people who have arrived that day (the fewest I saw in a week was fifteen; the most was forty; after that they stop accepting new clients for that week). They are called by one of ten prayer warriors, pastors or evangelists that are in the office every day, and taken into a private corner of a large room where they go over the form. The form is about twenty pages of questions that cover nearly every aspect of a client’s personal and family life. The form begins with general background: asking the date on which a person was born again, which church they belonged to when they were born again, which church they belonged to now, whether they had been baptised in the Holy Spirit and whether this baptism incorporated speaking in tongues. Next were a series of questions about the client’s moral behaviour in the past such as engaging in adultery, fornication, bestiality, lesbianism/ homosexuality, masturbation, oral sex, drugs or alcohol; pride, stubbornness, feelings of rejection, jealousy and anger. Then there are six pages of ‘spiritual history’, some general for example whether the client had ever been to a

Satanist church, whether they had been to a fortune teller or looked at their horoscope. Most of these questions referred specifically to ‘African’ spiritual traditions such as the location one’s placenta was buried, name dedications, membership of Poro and Sande, whether the client had been dedicated to any family gods or spirits, had any blood covenants, or had ever visited ‘occult healers’ or ‘witch doctors’. Then the form asked about the client’s parents: whether they had dealt in witchcraft, had formed any ‘traditional’ covenants; how many wives one’s father had, the number of times one’s mother married. Then the form asked about the symptoms; first, the major problem for which an individual was attending the deliverance clinic, how long the problem had gone on, what made it worse, and what types of treatment had been attempted. Following this, the form asked about the more subtle symptoms of demonic influence – specifically whether the individual had any dreams about eating, having sex, being pregnant, flying, falling, wandering through forests, being chased by soldiers, rebels, madmen and criminals, being in a canoe, in an ocean, swimming, snakes and insects. Finally, the form ends with a disclaimer and ‘release’ which the client has to sign, promising to not partake in any sort of ‘satanic’ behaviour while the deliverance rituals are being carried out. If a client does transgress during this time, then ‘the church shall not be held responsible for future demonic attack and problems that result’. The client is also required to make a ‘voluntary pledge’ of money, goods or service at this time. The church asserts that this pledge does not need to be given immediately or even in the near future, but that ‘the sooner you give it, the sooner God will bless you’.

A prayer is said and the client is given clear instructions about the next steps: Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday he or she is to come to the office at nine in the

morning, sharp, for deliverance class. He or she is to fast for each of these days, wake up from midnight to two in the morning to pray, and throughout the week associate only with people who he or she knows are ‘good Christians’. The client is told to wait outside while the form is passed onto Rev. Dagadu, who goes through each with a red pen and fills out the blank last page with his ‘diagnosis’. On it he writes the specific demons or curses that are being dealt with, and the ‘prescription’ which are the specific guidelines for prayers to be given by the prayer warriors during the following days, and possibly a recommendation for the client to purchase cassette tapes that contained detailed demonology for the listener to learn more. In some cases, if Rev. Dagadu needs more information, the client is called into the office and asked follow-up questions and perhaps given specific biblical passages to read.

The next morning, everyone gathers into the large room for the class, which starts promptly at nine with praise and worship. Those who are late are not allowed to continue their deliverance for that week, and must come to the class the following Tuesday. The class covers the basics of demonology and deliverance: what type of demons there are, how they can affect believers, and why deliverance helps. After the hour-long class the clients go to wait outside for their name to be called for prayers. This wait can last anywhere from ten minutes to three hours, depending on the order in which they arrived that morning. During prayers, the client is brought into a small room towards the back of the office, otherwise off-limits to anybody but prayer warriors, in which there are up to two other clients receiving deliverance prayers from one or two prayer warriors. The prayer warriors look over the form and Rev. Dagadu’s comments, and then explain to the client what is going to happen, how they might feel, what they can expect, and if they have any questions. They are told

which demons or curses are going to be broken, and the ways that these demons will manifest when they come out. They tell the client that although it is possible for the demon to manifest while the person is undergoing deliverance in that room, it is also possible that it will come out more slowly throughout the day, so that later on the client might vomit, have diarrhoea, fatigue, or any other variety of odd feelings or manifestations. The client is also told to remember his or her dreams from that night, to be reported the next day.

During the prayers, which can last anywhere from ten minutes to three hours, hands are laid on the client and he or she is told to repeat prayers that the prayer warrior says; these are essentially prayers to affirm one's faith and that 'Satan you have no power over me', and 'Satan, get out, get out'. The prayer warriors will then anoint the client with oil, and one prayer warrior puts a hand on the client's head and pushes it back while the other pushes the client's stomach in, all the while yelling 'loose!', 'get out!', 'blood of Jesus!' and speaking in intermittent prayer language, a form of tongues used specifically for spiritual warfare. During this time the warriors will also begin calling out the specific name of the demon that is afflicting that person, as diagnosed by Rev. Dagadu. For example: 'Get out demon of envy!', 'I break the curse of no marriage', or 'Leave this place Mami Wata spirit'. The next two days follow the same format except that the prayer warriors will begin the session by asking the client what dreams he or she had, whether he or she experienced any manifestations, how he or she feels, and the like. Based on this, the prayer warriors may need to offer additional prayers.

The clients are told to stop fasting at that point, but that they must come in at nine the next morning for their follow-up class. Some cases are dismissed on this day;

others which are considered to be more serious or require follow-up, are told to come back the following week for more ‘cleansing prayers’. During this time, most individuals will have successfully cast out their demons, but the following week is intended to ‘reinforce’ their new pure status by ‘building up’ the Holy Spirit in a person. Fasting is not required during this time, but attendance in the class is. At the end of the second week, the newly cleansed clients ‘graduate’ and undergo a final closing prayer. At this point they are considered to be totally cleansed of the demons that were originally identified, making them ‘much safer against the effects of demons, but there are so many sometimes it is difficult to get them all. If new problem comes, or problems don’t go away, then we can do more’.

The CEPC/CHRISEM deliverance process has been detailed because it is a unique to this church, although the ideology surrounding it is by no means out of the ordinary in the wider Liberian worldview. Indeed, the people who come to this deliverance clinic range from all denominations, ages, social groups and education levels. CEPC/CHRISEM simply has the best-run and most widely publicized deliverance clinic in Monrovia. I often sat outside the clinic while people were waiting and conducted interviews; nearly half of the clients were from churches not related to CHRISEM; some were members of mainline denominations; there were occasionally Jehovah witnesses, Mormons and members of AICs. I also met a number of people from Winners’ who came to CHRISEM because their church did not offer ‘deep deliverance for special cases’. There are clearly major differences between the churches’ methods of dealing with satanic influences in a believer’s life. However, at the root of all of their methods is the fundamental idea that the Holy Spirit is the only

power that can deal with it. The differences between the churches will be considered in more detail at the end of the chapter.

Next, we will consider more methods for a believer to eliminate or alleviate his or her problems, specifically those that are not perceived to be exclusively caused or exacerbated by demonic attack or influence.

#### *5.4.2 Solving problems caused by God*

While very many problems that Pentecostals experience are perceived to have demonic roots, we saw in the last chapter how some are perceived to have been caused or exacerbated by God. In some cases, God is perceived to have caused these problems as a form of punishment, so that the individual(s) change their behaviour; in other cases, these problems are part of a larger plan that is ultimately for the greater good, and which the individual(s) must accept.

##### *5.4.2.1 Avoiding punishment*

If it is perceived that the problem is punishment, then an obvious solution is to reverse whatever behaviour caused the problems in the first place, as described above: disobedience and lack of faith. The need for increased faith and obedience specifically to solve problems is often declared in sermons. For example at SUPC: ‘Do you know why people go out looking for solution to their problems? It is because they don’t have faith in God! The Bible says without faith it is impossible to please God... God is your solution!’ Similarly, at CEPC/CHRISEM: ‘How can we overcome? We sing songs of victory but we lie in defeat. God knows that when he

blesses you, he knows you will depart from the faith. When you humble yourself God will lift you up'.

Being obedient is often considered a way of glorifying God that will ensure He will not punish the believer, or hold back blessings; if problems already exist as a result of this disobedience, then if behaviour is changed, problems will be solved: 'Taking a vacation [from obedience] without God's approval is dangerous. God is able to do everything good with you again if you are willing to come back from your illegal vacation'. Similarly, at CEPC: 'Success comes from being obedient to the word of God'; 'The blessings of the Lord are great, but so are the demands'. At a CHRISEM revival, Rev. Dagadu explained, 'Disobedience has cursed the life of many valuable people. It is not the holy oil, miracle, it is obedience which leads to victory... If you want victory obey God's words.' In other Pentecostal and charismatic churches, the message is no different – sinning angers God; faith, obedience and repentance pleases Him.

To address problems caused by God, the churches turn to standard faith gospel theologies: that a believer needs to increase their faith that God will assist, demonstrated specifically through increased prayer, praise, and giving – tithes, offerings and seeds – all of which will 'please God' and encourage Him to release blessings. The idea that you can 'always praise God more' and 'always give more', in order to try to get more blessings, is frequently utilised in these churches' worldviews. I argue that this is yet another contribution to the flexibility, adaptability and practicality of Pentecostal spirit idioms that are used to help believers try to explain, predict and control their problems.

The fundamental idea of the faith gospel is that the more faith you have in God, the more you are able to claim what God has promised to you. Across the Liberian Pentecostal spectrum, the faith gospel is indispensable when believers are trying to solve problems, for example at Winners' Chapel: 'God confirms whatever you say as in Mark 16:20... either positive or negative as in Isaiah 44:26'; 'Say what you want... God will answer... it is the ministry of the mouth... Your mouth is a construction company! I will use it to construct my life!'; 'Praise is easier than prayer... There is no door that praise cannot open... Just believe God and praise Him, He will do something for you!' When God is pleased, the believer is not only able to tap into spiritual power, but is able to use this benevolent power to ask God for blessings and other divine help. If God is pleased, then blessings should 'flow down from heaven'. Similarly, consider a typical testimonial. At a CEPC Sunday service:

Something that hasn't happened for 15 years, since I came from school, I had to work but everywhere I applied, nothing would come of it. Since I left the walls of university I haven't worked. But since I encountered this ministry, things are turning around! I tell you brethren, nothing had been working in my life, nothing, I mean it. Nothing, no marriage, no job, nothing. It hasn't been an easy time. Last month, I went to a service, which said 'put a demand on God'. So I went into my closet of devotion, I said, 'God! November, I am going to work!'. Every day I went into my devotion and said this. And then suddenly I was called to work on November 5<sup>th</sup>... I want to give God the glory.

At SUPC, such declarations were also commonplace, as in one sermon: 'If you are having problems, medical problems, financial problems, you look up to the sky and you say, "Jesus, with your blood I remove these problems!" and from there you will see the end of problems! Success is yours, you just need to take it!' There are many more examples of the faith gospel being utilised in Pentecostal churches, but the churches deal with the details behind giving as a demonstration of faith slightly differently from one another.

In most Pentecostal churches there are at least two processional offerings, and as many as ten other opportunities to give ‘at will’, including running to the front to throw money at the feet of the person speaking. Before the processional offerings, the members put the offering into their hand. Generally the money is crumbled into one’s fist so that nobody else can see the amount. In Winners’ Chapel all offerings are put into an envelope and held in the air, and the offering is prayed for, usually asking God to grant the givers ‘divine increase’. Then the congregation dances through the aisles to throw the money into the basket. Each time money is asked for, the congregation is reminded that by giving the offering or seed, they are ensuring God’s blessings ‘in this life’. For example, at CEPC, ‘The secret to prosperity is giving. If you don’t, then you will not succeed’. And also,

You shouldn’t look for anything in return in order to love someone... Some people do a favour for you and expect you to do a favour in return. Don’t give because you want a reward! Give because you want God to bless you! What God gives you is the ability to explode!

An offering need not be monetary. Service in the church is a common ‘offering’ that is totally acceptable, and is expected to also yield benefits: ‘When you are serving God, attach something to it, like, ‘Lord, as I do X, Y, and Z grant me X, Y, and Z’. Also, offerings can take the form of items: food, soft drinks, petrol or a new roof, for example; usually these are dealt with during fundraisers that occur during all Sunday services at CEPC; less frequently at SUPC, and consistently but via the newsletter at Winners’.

Often, members are made to feel guilty for not giving offerings, even though it is not a ‘demand’ from God. Winners’ perpetual emphasis on Kingdom Service is effectively mandatory: ‘Anything you have does not belong to you. Are you the

owner of your strength, skills, time? Material? No! God gave these things for you, for you to invest in the promotion of God's kingdom.'

We have detailed the different Pentecostal explanations and solutions for problems in order to demonstrate the variety of options Pentecostals have when trying to explain, predict and control events in their lives in addition to those affecting Liberia as a whole. While all of these, taken together, are confusing at best, and contradictory at times, I will argue below that this makes Pentecostalism even more practical in chaotic post-conflict Liberian life.

#### 5.4.2.2 Accepting God's plan

If a believer continues to have a problem, despite being faithful and obedient, then the explanation that the problem is part of God's plan can be easily invoked. The solution here is simply acceptance that the problem might never be solved or later in life. In the meantime, then, the believer must discover God's plan and reorient his or her life so that it goes along with it, rather than constantly fighting against it. Not only will this fight against God's plan be futile, but it might also anger God. For example, in Winners':

Vision is divine insight into God's plan... life is an appointment. God is a God of plan and purpose. You are not a biological accident; you have come for a purpose and that thing you will behold... Only vision keeps you confident... Every time you step against this vision of your life you are kicking against the pricks, and you know kicking against the pricks is organizing setbacks against your life.

SUPC has the same idea that God has a specific plan for each person, and if the believer does something contrary to 'God's will', then problems will endure or get worse:

When you go where God does not want you to go, you end up having no peace of mind, but when you obey the will of God, you are going to be fruitful.

Though the will of God is not always sweet to us, it is the right step in the right direction.

Similarly, in another sermon,

If you change your ways, God can change his mind... If you don't make right with God, God will replace you. Sisters, God has something for you to do and you are running away from it. If you don't do what God wants you to do, the consequences will be dangerous. God wants you to do something.

#### *5.4.3 Winning souls*

As described in previous chapters, a major objective of Pentecostal churches is to 'win souls', that is, convert as many believers as possible in order to usher in the Kingdom of God. The importance of this mission is not simply because it is a Biblical mandate; additionally, Liberian Pentecostals see the many problems that the country faces as a reflexion of the spiritual imbalance because of the many people who are not born-again and thus 'on Satan's team'. The solution for public problems, then, is to convert others to Christ: 'What will help Liberia is if Liberians receive Christ; then the nation will have blessings abundant' ; 'Liberia as a whole has to return back to God and confess their sins; the church should pray, evangelise... The more souls won for Christ, the better the country will be'; 'The church can help Liberia if it builds more ministries to help people to change... We as a nation must put aside our wicked ways and pick up the cross of Christ'; 'The only thing that will help our country is evangelism to the infidels of Liberia, to minister the word of God to the lost so that people have a change of attitude; 'In Liberia the major problem is that more people don't know God... More evangelism is the key, to make people to know Christ... Then Liberia can improve more'.

Entire sermons were devoted to the importance of ‘winning souls’ and the issue was addressed in each church’s membership classes. In Winners’, for example, the membership class teacher stressed that,

[In] Acts 1: 8 – the mandate was to evangelise the world... The Holy Spirit was to impart them with power. Without power, if disciples had gone out before, they’d be powerless witnesses. Acts 10: 38, it says to tell other people how God anointed Jesus Christ with the Holy Ghost. He used the power not for himself but for the benefit of others... So you have the Holy Ghost, use it to go out, win more souls so they can experience the Holy Ghost too. Then they will go out, win souls, then Liberia will be conquered by the Holy Ghost! That is the mandate of God, when this mandate is fulfilled we will be without problem, we will see paradise!

The same message is stressed at SUPC, whose mission statement is: ‘We are commissioned by our Lord Jesus Christ to go into all the world to make disciples and teach/empower them... Truly, our goal is evangelism’. Sermons in SUPC also frequently refer to Liberia’s problems as a result of the country’s lack of believers:

Look around you, poverty, disease, corruption, lies, immorality... All of these problems in Liberia and they are getting worse! So how do we change it? Government? No! NGO? No! United Nations? No! Ok, we need these things too, but what is the real reason we have problems in Liberia? It is because we are not a nation for Christ. Some of us are, but not enough. Before we all turn to Christ, the Kingdom cannot be established and we will just see the problems getting worse and worse!

In another sermon, Pastor Benda explained that,

In a Living Church is the presence of God... There is the power of the Holy Ghost that will fight all the wickedness around us, poverty, sickness, hatred, crime... This church will save Liberia by covering it in the blood of Jesus!

At CEPC/CHRISEM, Rev. Dagadu and other leaders stress that the ministry was established ‘for the purposes of winning lost souls to Jesus Christ’; this statement appears on most of their pamphlets, reports and banners. CHRISEMS’s first crusade in 2005 was called ‘Breaking the Siege Over Liberia’ and was explained in their crusade report as,

Intended to break demonic strongholds and to remove the dark cloud of oppression, suppression, and depression and declare an opened heaven for Liberia... [We] envisaged that the breaking of the siege would result in the country and its people experiencing a new day.

Leaders and members of CEPC/CHRISEM consider this area as one of the most important ways of helping Liberia. As was taught in one Bible Study class:

If we fail to evangelise, the crime rate will increase... You should do one on one counselling; if you let man talk to you that will help bring the crime rate down... This is our responsibility.

Evangelism will also combat potential threats, as Deacon Butler told me,

There is a need to spread the gospel... If we do not, then this country will continue to have serious problems, nothing will improve. We already have no jobs, education, health care, people hate each other, fight, gossip. Unless we spread the word of God these things will not get better.

Although each church has different techniques, programmes, and measures of success for gaining converts, they are all ultimately working to win souls to expand God's Kingdom, which will be manifest as positive effects upon Liberia. Not only will God be more inclined to bless a obedient and faithful country; but having more strong Christians will help to limit Satan's attacks upon the country.

## ***5.5 Spiritual confusion***

### ***5.5.1 Admitting confusion***

Given all these potential explanations and methods of addressing one's personal problems, it is necessarily to consider what the Pentecostal believer makes of it all. For example, does a Pentecostal believer feel confused when the inability to get a job is explained, within five minutes of a sermon, as the result of not paying enough offering, a family curse, and/or a neighbour using witchcraft?

In addition to the countless sermons dealing with ‘discovering and uncovering the spiritual roots’ of believer’s problems, which itself indicates confusion about the exact explanation and method for dealing with them, a number of interviews, testimonies and conversations made this confusion even more explicit. Pentecostals openly admitted to being confused about these details, despite being very clear about the framework of good versus evil within which they situated their thoughts and actions. One example of a typical type of conversation I heard during my fieldwork will suffice to make this point. During the woman’s meeting at SUPC, one woman told the group about dreams she had been having:

It is late in the night, and I’ll have a dream where there are dogs chasing me, biting at my ankles. I run and run but they keep coming. Then I go into the bush and I see this bright light and when I enter it, I feel very cold. But the dogs stop, but then I feel cold and I am not calm, things are not okay. Then I wake up quick and I’m so hot. I don’t know what is happening but when I wake up I can’t sleep any more and I feel bad, really bad.

In response to this dream, Sis. Margaret explained that it appeared to be an indication of a demonic attack, and that the group should all pray against Satan’s hold on her. The dog, specifically, was suggestive that there was something eating at her spirit, making her feel depressed. Then another woman in the group suggested that ‘the bright light is Jesus, but she is not accepting Him, and it is why she is cold. So she can run to him but she doesn’t put her faith in Him, so He doesn’t take her in. She needs to check her faith’. Sis. Margaret agreed, ‘Yes, that could be true, but it might also be the devil in disguise, because he knows book [scripture], so you must take time [be careful].’ All of the women suggested a potential explanation and response, each one slightly different, but accepted as ‘possible, but we don’t know for sure’. The woman with the dreams then said, ‘Whatever it is, I know my good Lord can

help me, I have faith. I don't know, so it is why I am here today so that we can pray... Jesus will stop whatsoever is causing me to feel this pain'. All of the women stood in a circle around the woman, put one hand on her, and prayed for twenty minutes: 'We cover you with the blood of Jesus' and 'Satan, I rebuke you' being the most common phrases used. The following week, the woman reported that, 'The dreams have gone, I still wake up sometimes in the night with fear, but I have not dreamt that dream again. I thank Jesus for saving me'. Sis. Margaret confirmed that,

Yes, Jesus has helped you but there are other ways that these problems can return, so keep your obedience, keep your faith, make sure you are not selfish with offerings... It is not easy, you must work for your blessing, and sometimes you can't see what you are doing [wrong].

Believers were similarly confused when dealing with problems affecting Liberia. We have seen that in some cases, Pentecostals explain that Liberia's problems are a result of 'too many people who have not yet come to Christ' and that 'The power of the Holy Spirit cannot be fully released upon this country until we all turn to Jesus'. At the same time, the churches repeatedly stress that the power of the Holy Spirit, when properly used by strong believers, can affect other individuals, groups, situations, and even Liberia as a whole, despite the heathenistic masses: 'The power of Jesus is unlimited, one mustard grain that has the power of Jesus is enough to move mountains... is enough to wipe out Satan forever!'

When asked about this seeming contradiction directly, Pentecostal pastors and members gave a response, couched in spiritual rhetoric that, in its own right, made 'sense'. They would often acknowledge that it was 'a complicated issue' or that 'it can be confusing'; still, they had an answer. One major response was that in addition to winning souls to help Liberia, Pentecostals should also be engaged in offensive and

defensive spiritual warfare, ‘to be sure’. Another explained it as another part of ‘God’s will’; that spiritual power will be lost if more souls are not won. Another explanation was that God would bless his children but curse those who went against him; those few curses could ruin the establishment of the Kingdom. Members had a similar variety of explanations. Some simply shrugged and said, ‘I can’t know all the things of God’ or something similar. Still, nobody perceived this contradiction as a problem. As will be seen below, a contradiction is irrelevant if it is, at the same time, practical.

Despite the evident confusion that Pentecostals admitted to having surrounding these issues, they did not consider their inability to locate the exact source, and find the exact solution, as necessarily problematic. Quite the opposite, the ability to utilise a number of different explanations and methods of control was incredibly valuable and practical in their chaotic, unpredictable and often continuously problem-ridden daily life, so long as it was within the morally legitimate framework that Pentecostalism represents for Liberians. This point can also be demonstrated when considering the differences between churches’ methods of solving problems.

### *5.5.2 Differences between churches*

We have seen that within all the churches under consideration, there are very common general emphases about the potential source of problems: they might be the result of Satanic attack, God’s punishment or lack of blessings, or part of God’s plan. Deeper within this, all the churches have the same general explanations for why Satan is able to gain access, or why God has punished or held back blessings: lack of faith and disobedience. All the churches also agree that increased faith, obedience and

prayer will in turn both protect a believer from Satanic attacks, and also ensure divine assistance through increased blessings and avoiding punishments from God. All these themes and the sermons dealing with them would be easily transposed on any other church; believers and leadership would not question the ideas.

However, there are significant differences in the ways each church deals with the specific issue of deliverance. All admit that their believers can be hurt and influenced by demonic forces; all address the same personal problems that are believed to result from these demonic forces; all believe that only the power of the Holy Spirit can effectively combat these forces and thus solve the problem. However, CEPC/CHRISEM has an entire demonology, clinic, and crusade schedule designed specifically to cast out demons in a very systematic and explicit manner; Winners', by contrast, finds the solution in a 'simple prayer of deliverance' during scheduled appointments. While CHRISEM would certainly agree that a 'simple prayer of deliverance' is sufficient for certain cases, Winners' considers something like a deliverance clinic or a deliverance crusade to be totally misguided and unnecessary. What does this say about the churches' members' reasons for joining and staying in particular churches?

Despite the leaders' relative lack of emphasis on the demonic realm in comparison to CEPC/CHRISEM, most Winners' members I spoke to had undergone deliverance at a crusade, with another church, or a specific deliverance clinic (including CHRISEM's), for specific problems and during which they were diagnosed with specific demons – the same method that CHRISEM employed. They had done this deliverance, they generally said, because they had a 'specific problem' that was not solved using other spiritual or physical means, like inability to find a spouse,

recurring nightmares, or a medical ailment. Others underwent deliverance for ‘cleansing’ or ‘special protection’ for an upcoming event, like a job interview or exam, to ‘build up the Holy Spirit to help me to fight attacks’. None of these individuals indicated any discontent with Winners’ Chapel; none had any intention to switch churches because, as one put it, ‘I love my church, if I need special protection, I can come [to CHRISEM], but I will not leave Winners’, I found my God there, I feel my God there’. Therefore in certain situations, some believers found it necessary to seek out other spiritual methods for solving their problems, but this did not imply that the methods they used within their normal Pentecostal setting were considered to be any less legitimate.

Because of believers’ apparent lack of concern for the differences in the specific ways of dealing with spirits, I argue that it is not this aspect that makes one or another appealing (or not) to certain types of people. Rather, it is simply that they *do* deal with spirits in a practical and relevant way that is important. More specifically, it is the general framework that makes Pentecostalism so appealing; within this framework there is a common general goal to reorder the spirit world – the same spirit world that exists for anybody else in Liberia – so that victory is seen as a common general method for achieving it – by tapping into the morally legitimate power of the Holy Spirit.

### 5.5.3 *The practicality of confusion*

For Liberian Pentecostals, one thing is very clear: there is a battle between good and evil; as a born-again Christian, you are ultimately fighting on the side of God. Situated within this clear and morally legitimate framework, Pentecostals are *not*

confused about their identity as soldiers for God. However, when dealing with the finer details of the born-again lifestyle, it is evident that Liberian Pentecostals find the huge variety of explanations that account for their personal transgressions, and the huge variety of recommendations to address these transgressions, to be confusing, and whether or not something will be successful is uncertain. However, such confusion and uncertainty is not problematic for them; what matters instead is that they can always access new methods of explaining and controlling these spiritual forces that make them act and think in ways that are not desirable, however complicated and contradictory those explanations and methods of control may be. Therefore, their spiritual confusion is helpful because it reflects the confusing nature of their identity and role in post-conflict Liberian life.

Allowing for confusion and uncertainty regarding the spiritual causes and solutions to problems is precisely the element that gives Pentecostalism its enduring practicality in Liberia. Of course, Liberian Pentecostals are not alone in being unable to pinpoint the reasons for the war, enduring poverty and failing development projects; entire commissions, books and NGOs have been established to address these issues, always in discourse that is overtly secular, academic and reliant on a certain level of education and analytical capacity. Largely lacking these means, Pentecostals have put it into a spiritual discourse that gives people a language in which to begin addressing these problems. Just as inconclusive as academia and policy-oriented explanations, predictions and control, spiritual discourse enables people not just to address the issues, but also to account for the reasons their attempts to explain, predict and control their problems proved to be unsuccessful.

The reality of life in Liberia is that there is very little in terms of tangible work that most people can do in order to try to improve personal, social and political realities. Even if resources were available, most people are lacking the education or skills to even begin constructively addressing social and political issues in a concrete way. Every Liberian is concerned about the country improving; most Liberians will testify to wanting to do something to help. For most people though, the spirit world is the fundamental place in which to begin helping; for others, it is the only place. The spiritual discourse and activities found in Pentecostal churches concerning national problems are thus another reason for their popularity.

Faced with such an endless repertoire of spiritual explanations, believers are never left in a situation in which they feel that there are no more options available to try to understand and address the problem. Leaders will never admit, 'I don't know', or 'there is nothing to be done'. In the physical world, by contrast, admissions of not knowing or realising that nothing can be done are all too common. Therein lies the massive appeal of Pentecostalism, even though Pentecostals are not totally effective in achieving their ultimate goal: spiritual order that manifests as physical order. Pentecostals are able to work within a clearly articulated general framework in which the moral nature of one's lifestyle is clearly defined between right and wrong, good and evil, correct and incorrect, divine or satanic. Having this frame of reference is enough to give them a clear picture to work towards. The clarity of their worldview gives them a *feeling* of control over the situation. Because of that, many have made actual changes to their behaviour, and are constantly focused on keeping it that way by accounting for their failures without feelings of guilt, self-loathing or decreased confidence. Personal transgressions and enduring problems are not perceived as

failures or proof that God's power is limited, but rather as normal indications of the harsh battle that believers must be perpetually aware of and ready to fight in. In Liberia, a major part of maintaining good behaviour and avoiding problems is to remain on the defensive from the pervasive Satanic forces.

As this thesis is showing with respect to a number of different types of problems that Pentecostals are faced with, private and public, Pentecostal churches utilise a massive repertoire of spiritual explanations and actions, so that when the prescribed solution does not work, there are countless more potential causes and countless more potential solutions. Because of all the possible causes, and all the possible solutions that depend on those causes – but also depend on the believer's particular way of carrying out that solution and the amount of money tithed and offered, all combined with the question of what God's plan or God's will might be for that individual believer – a Pentecostal is never confronted with a situation in which there is nothing left to try. Instead, he or she is given constant explanations, constant plans of action and perhaps most important, a clear framework in which he or she has a clear and morally legitimate goal in mind: divine success. Such sentiments are perpetually indicated in mantras such as, 'I don't know what to do, but I know the Holy Spirit will solve it'; 'Leave your problems with God'; 'Jesus will work it out'; 'How can you know what only Jesus can know?', 'Don't worry, Jesus is working for you', 'Whatever situation you find yourself, however confused you are, Jesus is there for you to help'. Having methods of explanation, prediction and control over one's spiritual situation – in the Liberian worldview this is expected to manifest as having control in one's physical situation – is a critical aspect of Pentecostalism's popularity in chaotic post-conflict Liberia, where problems often endure.

### **5.6 Conclusion**

Most observers of Pentecostalism in Africa have pointed out that it is not surprising that a religion that pays serious attention to the spiritual realm will be attractive, especially when compared to mainline denominations that ignore this dimension. Pentecostalism is unique in that it takes this spiritual worldview seriously, and applies it to modern events that affect the individual's personal life. One way to look at the popularity of Pentecostalism is that the God preached in Pentecostalism is perceived by converts as another source of power to tap into to affect one's situation – another addition to the 'spiritual portfolio'. For many believers this might indeed be the case; churches would often chide members for coming to church and 'using Jesus like a magician'. While this promise of spiritual power might explain the initial appeal of a Pentecostal church, it does not explain continued attendance, commitment and activity within the church. If people were interested only in spiritual power, one might also see a similar increase in independent 'healers' and religious groups. Although of course, these do exist and there have been reports of increased allegiance to traditional societies and their religious rituals in rural areas, the unparalleled growth of Pentecostalism in Monrovia must have another element contributing to its appeal. This thesis argues that the critical elements are the morally legitimate framework within which are the numerous spiritual idioms that can be employed in order to articulate this-worldly concerns and address this-worldly problems.

This chapter has shown how Liberian Pentecostal worldviews are dualistic, and importantly so, but that there is also great ambiguity within this relatively clarified framework; therein lies a major aspect of the churches' appeal. Having looked closely

at this worldview, we can begin to ask what the potential implications of these religious ideas might be in the wider Liberian context. First, we will situate the findings from Liberia within the previously made debates regarding the socio-political role of Pentecostalism in other contexts.

## ***CHAPTER SIX***

### ***Case study: Pentecostals and transitional justice***

#### ***6.1 Introduction***

The previous chapters focused on the ways that Pentecostals tried to tap into the power of the Holy Spirit in order to solve their problems, and this perceived ability is a major reason for these churches' popularity in spiritually and physically chaotic post-conflict Liberian life. This chapter aims to address the details and implications of this spiritual worldview with specific reference to the moral and political difficulties surrounding transitional justice. By focusing on a single issue, it is possible to compare Liberians generally with Pentecostals; this comparison provides some useful insights into this thesis' consideration of Pentecostals in Liberia's wider context.

This chapter will examine Pentecostal opinions and perceptions of the TRC and wider issues pertaining to transitional justice, considered from three different perspectives. First, we will consider the explicit opinions that Pentecostals have, that is, those given in interviews and sermons and relating specifically to the issues surrounding the TRC. It will be seen that most Pentecostals, like Liberians generally, are opposed to the TRC and would rather 'forgive and forget' – that is, not address the issue in any explicit way, ever.

Second, we will consider the way Pentecostals perceive three major public figures in Liberian life, famous because of their high-profile brutality throughout the war, but who each have widely varied, but still high-profile, roles in Liberian public life today: Joshua Blahyi, Prince Johnson and Charles Taylor. Opinions about these characters reveal more insight into the way Pentecostals perceive the TRC, but also the wider

issues related to transitional justice. Most Pentecostals are supportive of ‘forgiving and forgetting’ each of these individuals, and not subjecting them to either restorative or retributive justice mechanisms. A key point being made through this comparison is that while Pentecostal opinions do not stand out to be significantly distinct from those of Liberians generally, what does stand out are the reasons they give for the opinions they have, and the certainty they have that their opinion is the correct one. Non-Pentecostals, by contrast, tend to be more ambivalent about their opinions, and when asked to explain the reasons for their opinions, have far less of a ‘vocabulary’ at their disposal. Just as they do when dealing with other personal and public problems, Pentecostals utilise a wide array of spiritual idioms to explain their thoughts and actions concerning transitional justice.

Third, we will consider the way Pentecostals deal with the more general ideas of forgiveness, reconciliation, peacebuilding and reintegration. Based on the tendency for Pentecostals to want to forgive and forget every crime committed during the war, it might seem that the Pentecostal worldview is, in essence, forgiving, and will therefore naturally support any process that effectively enables people to forgive and forget.<sup>1</sup> The chapter will go through a few examples in which Pentecostals exacerbated tensions and refused to forgive certain individuals involved in situations not related to the war. This shows, again, how Pentecostal spirit idioms, ever-flexible, can account for a Pentecostal’s need or desire to *not* forgive, *not* reconcile, or *not* promote reintegration. All this will further confirm, as have the previous chapters, the endless flexibility of Pentecostal spirit idioms that can account for a wide array of

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<sup>1</sup> As described in Chapter Two, some authors have argued that religions that preach such ideals might be naturally more inclined to be peacebuilders.

this-worldly situations; they are not world-creating, they are world affirming. They forgive, forget, and see spiritual purity when it is most practical; they shun, hold grudges and demonise when it is most practical. The endurance of Pentecostalism in Liberia lies in its ability to take whatever thoughts and actions are most practical at the time and easily legitimise them using spiritual idioms couched in a morally and analytically clear framework.

That the Pentecostal worldview is so flexible and practical, and that this is what attracts Liberians to it, leads to another point, particularly regarding the observation that one of the biggest differences between the way Liberians generally and Pentecostals perceive the TRC is in the *way* opinions regarding the TRC are articulated. The basic opinions, and the underlying logic regarding those opinions, are very much the same in both groups. This suggests that the reason that Liberian Pentecostals tend to disagree with the transitional justice mechanisms that do not simply ‘forgive and forget’ is not that they are Pentecostals, it is because they are thinking similarly to other non-Pentecostal Liberians, but legitimizing these opinions with Pentecostal spiritual idioms. Pentecostal worldviews, then, are Liberian worldviews made explicit, graphic, legitimate and morally clear.

### ***6.2 Popular Perceptions of Liberian Transitional Justice – The TRC***

Chapter three went through the vast literature surrounding transitional justice, with specific attention to TRCs; in addition, a brief background of the Liberian TRC was provided, describing its general mandate, goals, and methods for achieving these goals, in addition to highlighting some of the major logistical complications it has faced that call into question its legitimacy as a whole. In this chapter, the wide variety

of non-Pentecostal Liberian perceptions of the TRC will be described as they existed during the statement-taking process and immediately prior to the release of the TRC report, based upon personal interviews, observations of TRC proceedings, workshops and the media. From there, detailed attention will be given to the perceptions of the TRC and transitional justice generally amongst Pentecostals in the churches under consideration in this thesis. The point of this section is not to evaluate the effectiveness or value of the TRC, but rather to point out the limitations that most Liberians perceive it to have in achieving its goals of truth-telling, reconciliation, and trauma-healing, in the Liberian context.

### *6.2.1 Liberian perceptions of the TRC – Not strictly Pentecostal<sup>2</sup>*

#### **6.2.1.1 Misinformation**

Before outlining the major types of opinions among Liberians regarding the TRC, it is important to highlight the observation made by many<sup>3</sup>, including myself, that few people really understand the role, purpose, and jurisdiction of the TRC. Of course, these misunderstandings can critically influence the subsequent opinions about the process, so they are worth considering.

One major misunderstanding concerns exactly what the purpose of the TRC is. Truth telling, reconciliation, recommendations for amnesty, recommendations for prosecution or rewriting Liberian history are all purported roles of the TRC, but

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<sup>2</sup> This section attempts to discern the perceptions of the TRC among non-Pentecostals. While this was possible to do in personal interviews in which the informant's place of worship was asked, much of the 'Liberian opinion' presented in the media and as observed by others will, naturally, include that of Pentecostals. However, because none of these observations were focusing strictly on Pentecostals or even Christians generally, we can still note the differences in opinion.

<sup>3</sup> See especially Gberie, 'Truth'; Priscilla Hayner, ' Negotiating Peace for Liberia: Preserving the possibility for justice', *International Center for Transitional Justice*, November 2007; Amnesty International 2008 Assessment of the Liberian TRC.

many, including the TRC itself, do not understand what the TRC's main purpose is.<sup>4</sup> Some observers have found that, early-on, the TRC was misunderstood to be a domestic court.<sup>5</sup> Another major misunderstanding, again, one that is held in some measure by the TRC itself, regards its jurisdiction in granting amnesty. Some people, including those who testified, were under the mistaken impression that a testimony automatically leads to amnesty. Others were under the impression that whatever testimony is given can be used against that person in the future.<sup>6</sup> All these misunderstandings evidently contributed to the people's general confusion about the process and, ultimately, increased the likelihood that they would consider it to be irrelevant.

#### 6.2.1.2 General opinions – Uninterested, negative, positive?

The public perception of the TRC, prior to the release of the final report varied widely, as expressed in the media, casual conversations and formal interviews. It is important to point out that despite the resources and importance given to the TRC, it was relatively ignored by most of the public and the media. When certain major perpetrators would speak publically, or when certain names were brought up that Liberians knew, attention increased. However, most of the dealings were ignored; public hearings were relatively under-attended and most people did not openly talk about the TRC unless prompted by my questions or a major news story.

However, when the issue was brought up in personal interviews with non-Pentecostals, there were three major types of opinion: uninterested, negative or

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<sup>4</sup> Lansana Gberie, 'The 2009 TRC Report', *The Liberian Times*, July 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Amnesty International 2008 Assessment of the TRC.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

positive. While some were impassioned about their opinions, most were quite ambivalent, but leaning towards the negative. One type of response revealed evident lack of interest in the process, for example ‘I don’t think anything about it’, ‘I don’t understand it’ or ‘I don’t know anything about it’. By this, they meant that, of course, they have heard of it and they know that it is a venue in which people say what happened during the war, but they simply didn’t care about it. Many of these people acknowledged that they didn’t know what it was really for, and what power it had to help Liberia. The TRC did not affect their lives in any way, they usually said. Such respondents did not pay attention to stories in the news, public testimonies, what the TRC’s legal mandate was, nor had they ever considered voluntarily telling their story in front of the TRC. There was also an evident lack of understanding about the TRC process and goals because most Liberians are poorly educated and thus lacking the analytical skills or discourse to deal with such complex issues as the strengths and weaknesses of certain types of transitional justice.

Other responses were negative – that the TRC was ‘very bad’, ‘not good’; some even said, ‘wicked’. From those with a definite negative opinion came a wide variety of reasons, theoretical and practical; some people were more ambivalent than others. The major theoretical point made by Liberians was that the proceedings hurt Liberia because it ‘opened old wounds’; this would cause ‘confusion and tension’ in the country, still holding on to a fragile peace. Instead of dwelling on the past, they insisted that it was best to ‘forget about it and concentrate on the future’. Others pointed out that revisiting the past could rekindle conflict:

What if xyz person says on the stand, ‘Oh, I killed this man’, and then in the audience, that man’s son is sitting there. What is that man going to do? Revenge! He won’t just sit there and forgive because the TRC tells him that it is good! Then

when that man hurts the other man, his friend hurt that man, and then look, war! We are at peace now, let us keep that way and move forward.

Many people also considered the idea of a TRC harmful because they did not see how it could lead to personal healing in themselves or anyone else. The idea of openly talking about the atrocities and trauma experienced during the war, simply because ‘those people tell to’, was nonsensical. They did not want to hear others talking about it, nor would they ever think about telling their story: ‘What will the TRC do for me?’ was often repeated.<sup>7</sup> One woman pointed out that, ‘If I want to tell my story, I’ll tell my story, I don’t need TRC to tell me to do it. Anyone who wants to tell the story will do it; if they don’t they will not, even if TRC asks them. So what does the TRC do?’ Others pointed out that having to hear about the death of a loved one, especially in newspaper reports or word of mouth, was re-traumatising them: ‘I moved on, things were fine, then I hear all this talk of when they killed my brother and burned my village, why do we have to talk of these things? I heard these things again, and I went home and I just felt bad, I still feel bad.’ The TRC was also evidently pointless for a number of people who participated in the war, as one young ex-combatant said to me, ‘Why would I go to the TRC, why would I go tell them what happened during the war? If they give me money, fine! I will go there, but they won’t give me anything, that TRC is nothing!’

Even those who acknowledged the theoretical value of truth telling and addressing the past in order to heal the future highlighted the practical problems with the proceedings of Liberian TRC, which in turn made it illegitimate. One major opinion was that the TRC existed only to enrich the commissioners who were

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<sup>7</sup> Abramowitz found similar results in her study of Liberia. Sharon Abramowitz, *Psychosocial Liberia*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Harvard University, 2008.

perceived as having ‘connections’ and, who were earning a very respectable salary, and that it was so over-resourced, and doing so comparatively little, that it was just another example of Liberia’s endemic nepotism. Many also thought that the TRC existed only to appease the international community, but that it was in actuality a front for filtering aid money to the corrupt ruling elite. Others had complaints about the TRC’s actual proceedings. For example, many pointed out that the TRC was being used as a place where warlords, politicians and businesspeople simply boasted about who they were, their qualifications, and how important they were in Liberia: ‘These people, they are not there to say I’m sorry, they are there to say, ‘Look at me, I am so great.’ If people took the TRC seriously, it would be great, but nobody will, they just go and waste time, so it is very bad’.

Also, many people considered most of the perpetrators to be lying about what they did or did not do during the war, usually by not admitting to their guilt:

These big men, they go to the TRC and they just lie on it. What is the point in pressuring these guys go to the TRC when they don’t want to go, so when they go they just deny things they did. They don’t confess, they don’t apologise. No truth, no reconciliation. What good is this?

Even those perpetrators who admitted to doing wrong during the war and apologised in the TRC were still perceived negatively by many people: ‘Some of these guys, they go and admit that they were wicked, because everybody knows they were, but then they give a fake sorry, they don’t mean it, they just want amnesty, so they say sorry’.

Another common complaint was that the majority of the people who gave testimonies were victims. Many alleged perpetrators either denied their involvement or refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the TRC proceedings. Most of the well-known perpetrators had to be summoned to the TRC. Because of this, it seemed to

many people that the TRC was more of a venue for victims to tell horrible stories, and the perpetrators to pretend nothing had happened. After all, nothing was forcing most low-level perpetrators to come forward, as one woman explained that ‘the TRC is good, but it will not get most of these guys, like, who will go say I did some crime, if they will just go and convict me? What wicked man will go say “I did so, so and so, please, arrest me here”, No! So the truly wicked men, they stay away’. If more perpetrators had been forthcoming and genuine about their wickedness during the war, people of this opinion explained, the process would have been a wonderful success; unfortunately, most weren’t. The media was especially vocal with this type of criticism.

Some people saw the value in truth-telling, but had complaints about the idea of amnesty. Some thought the possibility of amnesty was an ‘easy way out’ for major perpetrators: ‘The TRC is very good because it makes us know the truth about what happened. It is good to know the wickedness that happened so that we can not do it again. But this business of amnesty is not correct. They tell the story, then they just walk away like nothing happened. This is not justice’.

Others similarly saw the value in truth-telling, but had complaints about the idea of prosecution. For them, anybody should be forgiven and granted amnesty, whatever they did and whether they publically admitted to it or not. The possibility of recommendations for prosecution, they saw, was dangerous for Liberia because ‘if you try to convict some of these guys, it will create major tension’. When the final report came out in June 2009, this prediction was evidently true, particularly when Prince Johnson was named as a major perpetrator and responded by issuing threats to ‘anybody’ who tried to charge him for a crime.

Finally, a third type of response about the TRC was vaguely positive, something like, ‘Good, it is good to tell the truth and say I’m sorry so that we can forgive and move on’, or, ‘It is good to forgive and then we can forget’. Nearly all of the respondents who thought the TRC was a good thing alluded to its ability to ‘help us to forget’. When pressed for more reasons that the TRC was helpful for Liberia, most people had very little more to say and would simply repeat the vague TRC mantras: ‘Truth telling will help us to reconcile’; ‘If we know the truth the truth will set us free’; ‘We must look to our past to look to our future’; ‘If we know where we went wrong then we can bring peace’ and ‘It is good to say I did bad and then say I’m sorry’.

Whatever positive feedback people gave the TRC was based on a fundamental misunderstanding or the TRCs goals or actual achievements. For example, one woman explained that ‘The TRC is making it so the bad guys have to sponsor the children of the people they killed, so it is good because it will help people to send their kids to school’. Another woman explained that, ‘The TRC is so great because it will give my parents village money because the rebels burned it during the war’. In general, the positive opinions about the TRC were the result of people’s misconception that it would somehow result in their receiving reparations. So, while people had confidence that it could work, nobody pointed out specifically how it was working. I never spoke to a single individual who considered the TRC to be overwhelmingly good in both theory and practice.

The main praise for the TRC came from a few media outlets, and from the TRC itself. The TRC report highlights a few stories about how it helped someone to forgive or move forward. Some narratives were given in newspapers in which a

perpetrator ‘held the foot’ of a victim, and the victim expressed forgiveness. These types of success are what the TRC intended to achieve, and claimed to achieve. While I do not doubt the positive effect that the TRC might have had on these people, and many more, from my fieldwork, it seems that the samples given in the TRC final report, and the stories spun by certain media outlets, are totally unrepresentative of the Liberian attitudes which are at best ambivalent about the process, as shown above.

So, in summary, many Liberians considered the idea of a TRC to be in essence useless or harmful. While some acknowledged the theoretical value of the TRC in ‘exposing the truth’, they generally also highlighted one or many major problems with the proceedings, and therefore considered the TRC to be unsuccessful. In short, the Liberian opinions about the TRC were ambivalent at best, but usually quite negative; those who were overwhelmingly positive about it usually had a misunderstanding about what its purpose was and impossible expectations about how it would help them.

### *6.2.2 What is a better way to peace and reconciliation?*

These non-Pentecostal respondents were also asked what they considered to be the best step forward for Liberia, in terms of keeping the peace and reconciling with one another. Almost everybody, whatever their opinion or (mis)understanding of the TRC, said that the most important thing was for Liberians to ‘forgive and forget, and focus on the future’. In response to the question, ‘What is the best way to forgive and forget?’ there were three types of response, sometimes overlapping.

#### *6.2.2.1 Vague or circular responses*

One type of response was extremely vague or used circular reasoning. Consider the following typical responses, ‘How can we forgive each other and forget the past? Well, we must have a forgiving heart, and then we can forgive each other’; ‘Liberia will be at peace only if we love each other and reconcile. This is the important step, not the TRC’; ‘The TRC can remind people of bad things that happened, it would be better to forget and let bygones be bygones. Liberia needs to just look to the future. We look to the future by not remembering the past’; ‘What will help Liberia is if we concentrate on the future... We will concentrate on the future by looking forward’; ‘The TRC is bad because it roots out old things and bad feelings, it is important to forget about the past and focus on the future’; ‘The TRC is good because one can reconcile with his fellow brother... What will help Liberia is to forget about the past and focus on the future’. These vague responses were common, and few people had any specific ideas about achieving peace and reconciliation in Liberia other than ‘forgive and forget’.<sup>8</sup>

#### 6.2.2.2 Informed, academic

A second type of response was more informed; nearly all of these came from individuals with at least some college education, and who kept up with the media.

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<sup>8</sup> In another study conducted, it was found that in Montserrado County, 60.5 percent of 3906 persons suggested that it was best to simply ‘forgive and forget’; by contrast, only 2.7 percent thought retributive justice was the best way forward (1.5% wanted reparations; 3.5% wanted equal rights/job opportunity; 9.3 wanted peace programs, 0% wanted other). Among the respondents’ specific recommendations to the government, only 3.3% wanted retributive justice; 3.7% wanted restorative justice, and the majority 37.9% wanted good governance. These figures for Montserrado County are very similar to those in the country as a whole. The question ‘How can reconciliation be achieved in Liberia’ elicited nearly 60% of respondents saying it was best to ‘forgive and forget’; less than 5% wanted retributive justice. Kristen Cibelli, Amelia Hoover and Juile Kruger, ‘Descriptive Statistics from Statements to the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission’, *Benetech Human Rights Program*, June 2009, 38.

They would stress the importance of forgiving and forgetting, but understood that such things did not just happen. For example:

It is difficult for people to forget; they say they forget but of course it is still fresh in their minds; they just don't want to say it. While the TRC is supposed to help them, I see them just re-traumatising these people. They treat them like they are convicts in a court: 'Where were you then, what did they do, why didn't you run away'. Then they treat the big men with respect, joking with them, calling them sir...this is not good for the victims of their crimes. How will the TRC help them to forget when they are giving respect to the man who killed their families? A better way is within the community; let communities deal with these problems themselves. That is where reconciliation begins, not because the TRC told me so.

Another said,

It is a difficult issue. Of course, the idea is alright I guess. It has worked in other places like South Africa, and it is important here to make sure we don't just pretend nothing happened... But the Liberian people, they are too sensitive now, we are just out of war, so when you start talking about massacres and eating flesh and all this stuff, it is not good! It is too soon! Ok, we need to end impunity, yes, but the Liberian people are not ready for these stories to be all over the place, there are too many young boys out there who will pick up their guns just for their daily bread, so we can't incite tension like this.

#### 6.2.2.3 Spirit idioms

Many people articulated their opinions and ideas in an entirely different language and logic – that is, in spirit idioms. This third type of response was common across all types of people, including those with different education levels and religious affiliations, and involved various levels of detail. Most were quite vague: 'Only through prayer and commitment to God will Liberia be peaceful'; 'If the Liberians can have trust in the Almighty God then we will be fine'. Others were more detailed and certain: 'Praying to the almighty God can help us to be sorry... Then God can help us to forget and move forward'; 'We should have a weekly prayer and fast in order to keep peace'; 'If Liberians will change their wicked ways and turn to Christ, then they will stop hating each other and we will not fight again'. Still other responses

were even more detailed, impassioned and articulate: ‘The devil put them [TRC commissioners] there to bring Liberia back down, to remind Liberia about our wickedness, so I do not support this TRC... True peace can only come with God. The TRC is a trick of the devil, they say they want peace but they want war again... I heard they use dark arts over there to try to compel people to talk’.

As described in Chapter One, people have an acute awareness of the importance of the spiritual element of their country’s political, social and economic future; this is not necessarily dependant on a person’s education, religion, age or any other factor. Among Pentecostals, it will be seen, this spiritual element is made explicit; it is an absolute necessity to involve God in the process and they are uniquely adamant about this point. In addition it will be seen that they have significantly more ideas and activities than their non-Pentecostal counterparts to go about doing this – all of these ideas and activities refer to the spirit world.

The following section will go into more detail about the way Pentecostal members and leaders of the churches under consideration perceive the TRC and peacebuilding. It will be seen that although putting these complicated issues into spiritual idioms was certainly evident among non-Pentecostals and even non-Christians, it was far more common, and often more graphic and impassioned, among Pentecostals. Their perceptions will be detailed to give further evidence that these churches have gained popularity because they provide a language that people can utilise to deal with the immediate problems in their life; in this case, surrounding the confusing and difficult-to-articulate but obviously important issues relating to peace and reconciliation that, directly or obliquely, they are forced to deal with every day. Without the variety of spiritual idioms at their disposal within the ideologically dualistic but practically

flexible Pentecostal framework, there exists spiritual confusion and enduring spiritual disorder. The Pentecostal churches actively address this and in this case, what is at stake is Liberia's peace. Though they may not talk about it openly, maintaining peace is undoubtedly at the forefront of most Liberians' minds.

### ***6.3 Pentecostal perceptions of the TRC***

This section will detail the ways Pentecostal churches deal with the issues surrounding transitional justice and the TRC specifically. Acknowledging that it is possible that explicit opinions regarding the TRC specifically provide only a limited understanding of how Pentecostals think about or act upon issues related to peace and reconciliation, their perceptions will be considered by considering them in three ways. First, the explicit opinions about the TRC itself; second, the explicit opinions about some key public figures involved in the war and, by association, the TRC; third, the general values supported by Pentecostals that are the same as those encouraged by the TRC.

#### ***6.3.1 Explicitly***

##### ***6.3.1.1 General opinions – uninterested, negative, positive?***

First, it is necessary to consider the explicit Pentecostal opinions about the TRC and transitional justice. It is important to point out that, like Liberians generally, it was quite rare for any person to openly address issues surrounding the war or the TRC unless otherwise prompted, either in response to specific interview questions or in discussing a major news story. Of all the Pentecostal services and meetings I attended, none addressed the TRC specifically; issues surrounding post-conflict

justice generally were very rarely alluded to and, if issues were addressed, they were never to large audiences. Nor did any of the churches under consideration ever hold a class or meeting in order to ‘sensitise’ the people about what the TRC was or why they should get involved and learn more. Conversely, many mainline churches and organisations devoted resources specifically to this.<sup>9</sup>. Because of this general lack of explicit interest in the TRC and post-conflict justice within the Pentecostal religious setting, opinions regarding it came through interviews and informal focus groups in which informants were asked to talk about it generally.

Pentecostals tended to be similar to Liberians generally in their initial opinions about the TRC. Many were uninterested in the process: ‘I don’t think about it’ or ‘I don’t know anything about it’ were very common initial responses. Others were distinctly negative about the theoretical use of such a process: ‘The TRC, it was very bad to hear that your parents were killed by Mr. X. We need to just forget these things and concentrate on the future’; ‘I think [it is] bad, because we shall [should] forget about the past and think on the future’; ‘The TRC is very bad; it is good [better] to forget about the whole thing than to remind people on [about] how their parents or relatives died’. Some were positive about some theoretical aspects of it but highlighted the practical problems:

The TRC, well, the essence is not clear. We thought it would be fine, but what we thought it could be is not what we see. Alleged perpetrators can be [are] tried, cannot [do not] give information for fear of prosecution. It is not reconciliatory. The best way [would be] to call a reconciliation conference, to have people forgive one another, no matter what. Prosecution could serve as a deterrent, but nobody is admitting anything. I think to help Liberia, we should forget the past and forge ahead.

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<sup>9</sup> For example, the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission was highly involved, often with the Carter Center, in educating community representatives about the TRC, and encouraging people to participate.

Others were positive about the TRC, but, like most Liberians of the same initial opinion, highlighted its positive role as a way of ‘forgetting’ or ‘moving forward’: ‘Good, this clears the minds of people towards others and keeps out hatred, so we can forget and move forward’; ‘Good, it is better to expose the truth and later forget about it’. Also, like other non-Pentecostal Liberians, many who were positive about the TRC also pointed out that it was good only because they expected to get financial resources out of it: ‘All I know about it is that if I go tell the truth, then they will help me’; ‘Their job is to find out the wickedness during the war and make it not happen again by giving us money and rebuilding our schools and villages’.

Therefore, in considering initial reactions, there was no significant difference between the opinions of Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals; most were negative or ambivalent at best; very few were overwhelmingly positive and if they were, they were basing their optimism on a misunderstanding of the process’ goals.

However, when asked for more specific reasons about their opinions, or what specifically they thought were the problems with the TRC process, most Pentecostals, like some non-Pentecostals, were able to articulate, often passionately, why they thought what they thought, that is, legitimate their strong opinions. In doing this, they nearly always employed spirit idioms. These idioms were flexible in their application – many of the opinions that people had were explained with reference to the deeper spiritual battle between good and evil. To show this reliance that Pentecostals have on spiritual idioms, the rest of this section will go through some of the most common ways the spirit idioms were used by Pentecostals to explain the problems with, and propose alternatives to, the TRC’s role in peace and reconciliation.

### 6.3.1.2 Personal transformation of perpetrators

One way spiritual idioms were used was to explain the opinion that the TRC did not encourage or require that people were truly changed, as a person should be when becoming born-again. For example, Sister Georgia of CEPC/CHRISEM passionately told me,

The TRC, I really think bad[ly] of it. True forgiveness, it takes the power of God, OK, not man. That's what the Bible says. To err is to human and to forgive is divine. So when it comes to the TRC, the TRC doesn't have a Biblical backing. These people are there, they give testimony, they still have the devil! TRC does not take the devil out! They go say they are sorry but that means nothing if they still have the devil! How can you do it [confess and apologise] if you don't have a biblical backing, so, if a person comes to confess to [another] person and says 'I loved to [have sex with] your wife'. What kind of bad thing do you get to [how will you feel about] that person, if you don't have the forgiving heart of Christ? You will fight! And in the TRC, people say they killed your family, but you don't have a forgiving heart and they are still demonic and look, no biblical backing, so it can only cause problem... So TRC I'm totally against it... If you do it [confess and forgive] because the power of Christ has compelled you, then it is real, and it means there is a real change [in you] and there will be peace. The TRC business is just pretend change, the devil's lies, trying to infiltrate Liberia again... [people] are going there and there is no backing, they say something, there is nothing to back it.... For Liberia, it is better, first, if you put god first. Secondly... You have to implement it. So there are good things that will be said in the church, you have to implement these things.

Similarly, Pastor Benda of SUPC explained:

What I'm saying is that true reconciliation should start within. Change must take place within and then the fruit will be seen from without. For instance, if Dr. Benda were taken to the TRC and Dr. Benda said well, he killed Gwendolyn's mother, he killed her father, killed her two children and so he's making public confession. And that's it! He goes back home. Fine. He has said it! But what if here is a recurrence of another civil war? And I have not been transformed from within, by the spirit of God, through the preaching of the Word of God, being counseled by pastor, people lay hands on you and pray for you. The devil is still there, the devil must be defeated before a person is changed. For you to come to your senses and realize that look, this think I did was wrong and I think I shouldn't repeat it. OK, if that does not happen, and there is a shootout, in like a year or two, it is very possible for Dr. Benda to take arms, the same Dr. Benda that stood before the TRC and said well, blah blah blah, I take arms even then because the change did not come from within. And so someone like the person is coerced because you have been imposed on to talk. So in most cases sincerity will

be questioned because if I sit before an audience to tell them what all I did, at some point, I will defend myself, for fear that there will be a public thing that will tie me down, and embarrass me. So if we want to have true reconciliation in Liberia, within the church or the religious community is where we should start from. Or better still, we should really look at the religious community and make sure that look, these people are preached too, these people have come to repentance, and accept Jesus as their savior. So let it be something that will be permanent, otherwise at TRC, you will not have permanence. It will not have conflict resolution.'

A common narrative involved the way that coming to Christ changed an individual so that they would refuse to fight again; the TRC, by contrast, could not do this for anybody who was 'truly wicked before':

Look at poverty rate! Too high! Look at unemployment! Too high! Look at the security of this country! The crime is high! Let's talk about ex-security officers. If the government can do something to make sure that the ex-soldier, ex-security officers are okay, but what the government did is just give something small [DDRR benefit] to them, and said let bygones be bygones, stop fighting... But after you pay everybody off, they will use the money, do one or two things with their money then they have nothing. You need to give them job, for permanent help. Some of these people, 10 years on the street, they will fight again... One way we can overcome this is through Christ. Look at me, nobody can use me again as an instrument to fight, because Christ is in me. I will not fight again. I don't care if you give me one million dollars, I will not fight again!'

#### 6.3.1.3 Opening old wounds – reigniting tension

Spirit idioms were also used to explain how the TRC was opening old wounds that could reignite tensions in Liberia:

You see, the devil knows scripture, and he can infiltrate because people think something is good. But that is how he works, it takes the power of Jesus to get him out. But the TRC, it looks like the devil is involved there because he knows that the Liberian people are still recovering from the fourteen years civil war... Most people forgive but not everybody, so the devil is making sure that he can open old wounds to make those people vex again... You see in Liberia, all it takes is a few people to be vex, then they can create confusion and war will begin again...if the UN were not here, I think the TRC would already have caused more war. But look, the UN is leaving, that is the devil's work, he knows that if he lets there be small peace, then the UN will leave but then when they are gone and cannot stop the fighting, he will make somebody to reveal some story, and it will

cause confusion and people will fight. It is dangerous this TRC... It makes people to talk on bad things, and whatever you say is what will come true.

#### 6.3.1.4 'I tell these things to God, not man'

Spirit idioms were also used to explain why it was unnecessary to testify in front of the TRC, as described by one ex-combatant who now works for Winners' Chapel:

Oh! [The TRC], I will not go speak there. I don't want to go there. That is not my way of dealing, I don't want to go tell Liberia I did this, I did that. I tell these things to God, not to man. When you confess with your mouth, and believe that Jesus died for us, you will be saved. What am I going to confess to you for? If I confess to you, you will laugh at me! You will tell me, "Oh man, what [his name] say" ... It can embarrass me if I say that in public, [but] if I confess to my heavenly father who makes heaven and earth, who am I again to confess to you, why should I do that? I can't [don't] even confess to my pastor, I confess to my God! That is all I need... Any man that goes in front of many and confesses to that man, that man he is just making fun of himself. Yes. He just wants to show off. If he is really sorry, he would have dealt with it with God... Some people thought, God has called them to tell their story in public, so people can know what the devil is doing. But for me, to talk out loud is bad, and all these other people talking out loud is bad... When the Bible says forget about the past. The past can't do you no good. It can only damage you. When you start talking about the past, you will damage your life. Think about your future, where you are going, that is your main thinking.

#### 6.3.1.5 Punishment will help nothing

Many people explained how the times during the war were different from today, it was a 'time of wickedness', and therefore whatever happened during that time needs to be forgiven because, as evident today, those times have passed:

That war! No man was able [to avoid it]... So you cannot blame anybody... In 1992 they took my brother life... The war killed my brother because, why, that was war! You cannot blame anybody, it was a wicked time, and the devil was strong. Those boys, the were possess[ed]... But today, war time has pass, and if you took anything from somebody [hurt somebody in the past], the government will hold you responsible and then so [punishment]? It were bad, the things they were doing. But right now I say forgive them, as a human, forgive them. Forgive everybody. If we go punishing everybody then there will only be more trouble. Just leave it with God, God will judge whatever man.

Similarly:

What you see about Paul, he was Saul, he oppressed the church, but after his encounter with the Lord, he didn't need to go through anything [physical punishment or justice], so what I believe is that if somebody, one way or the other, decided to leave this life for the Lord, then I don't think there is anything better for him... If he doesn't repent, what we know is that his sin will find him out, and the wages of sin is death. They say evil will also pursue the sin. So we leave them to their own judgment with God. It is not man's role.

#### 6.3.1.6 (Recommending) punishment is dangerous

Spirit idioms were also used to explain why it was a bad idea to try to punish certain perpetrators:

Well, they have this group that is calling for it [establishing a criminal court for war perpetrators], and the TRC is supposed to say who should get a punishment. But if they do it, it will be a setback to the Liberian people. Number one, they will start going to people, carrying them to jail, and the same people they carry, they got their boys all over. And if you grab them, it can cause problem. It will bring a setback. The devil is still all over the place, and he is in many of these guys, so it only takes a small spark to get the flame going. The devil doesn't leave because of court, no, the devil will go with true confession and repentance... To me, I would just suggest that let bygones be bygones, let Liberians forget about this war crimes, even TRC they are bringing a lot of confusion. So if you go over there, say something you are not supposed to say, most people don't want to hear about it. And then the people who go talk they are lying. Because they say, I kill your mother, I kill your father, I eat your sister, I eat your brother. If I say it in front of you, what will you do? You will go get your friends... God is the one who fights our battles. Not man... If you put man in jail... Sometimes people will be going up and down, just tell God thank you for all man.

Another said,

Yeah, you see, there is the complicated issue of the state and the spiritual. I want to look at it this way... If there are two guys at the TRC both who did bad, but only one is confessing and the other is denying, the TRC will let one go and punish the other one... But me, I think this is false... All in all, I believe one should just let everything go. Because all of the men who are testifying... Maybe the one who denies it they are afraid of one or two things that can happen to them, like maybe people outside will want to get revenge... The truth of the matter is that both of them committed the same wicked things during the war; the only thing the other man doesn't want to admit of his act to the Liberian people. That is the state, but if you look at the spiritual, it is easy... If you want a general peace, then reconciliation, then you have to leave it alone, leave history in the past. You

have to compromise by letting it go, because there is nothing you can do to that man in the physical that can be compared to what he did. That will be taken up by him and God, so we can just leave it for now.

#### 6.3.1.7 God will work through the TRC to do His will

One pastor acknowledged that, while he did not support retributive justice for anybody involved in the war, it was likely that it might happen sometime in the future if the TRC called for it. No true believer, however, would be subjected to punishment. As one Winners' Pastor explained:

Some people may have to face their judgment in this world. One thing I know is that God doesn't hold back any man, so if you are willing to change your life then He is willing to forgive. God will let the innocent go free. If a man really confessed, you understand, and he is sure of what he's saying, God will forgive him. If he gets to jail that is not God... God will not send him to jail... If a man ends up in jail, then it is because God has not intervened to stop that... So the TRC, I don't quite agree with it but we can't question God, so we must have faith that he is working through it.

An office assistant at Winners' explained it quite differently, suggesting that in some circumstances God might put a believer in jail:

Well, if a man confessed, repented, told God I'm sorry, and then was put into the physical court and went to jail, then I think it must be the plan of God. So God might not intervene and keep him out of jail, he might let the TRC tell him to go to jail, but we cannot question it, but look for the reason, why? So, maybe the role he has now is to evangelise to the people in the jail. If the man is truly born again, then the devil cannot have a role in that, but it is God's will, so we must accept it.

What all of these interviews convey clearly is that the TRC is not perceived to address the more-important underlying (spiritual) issues that caused the war in the first place, nor is it perceived to be addressing the ongoing underlying (spiritual) issues that might threaten the peace, and cause periodic disturbances, violence, and crime. Therefore many people have the opinion that because of its blatant secularity the TRC is, in essence, illegitimate. At best, it is simply not sufficient without

allowing an obvious Christian component. As the last two examples illustrate, even if the TRC is viewed positively, this is because it is understood as part of God's plan. This does not mean that believers are all totally physically detached from the situation. Many highlighted the same problems and limitations of the TRC that academics, policymakers and other critics have – false apologies, lies, danger in prosecutions in the midst of a fragile peace, re-traumatising people by bringing up painful memories, etc. Ultimately, Pentecostals are certain that the TRC will not achieve its goals because it is too superficial, that is, without spiritual depth. Instead, they argue, truth and reconciliation is better achieved and more permanent when it is the result of an intervention by the Holy Spirit; with that, one can be sure about the elimination of demonic agents that cause hatred, violence and war. Having recourse to this language in order to explain one's misgivings about the TRC enables the believer to have a (relatively) active and informed opinion about these issues. Again, as has been shown throughout this thesis, Pentecostal spirit idioms enable people to adapt these spiritual idioms within a generalised framework, in order to address the event or idea they are faced with; this specific example is no different.

The Pentecostals are distinct from Liberians generally, then because of their *method of explaining* their opinions, and their spiritualised *method of addressing* its limitations. The spiritual idioms, situating the issue within the framework of the battle between good and evil – what real personal transformation, forgiveness and reconciliation is based upon – enables people to articulate and consolidate their opinions better, rather than being simply ambivalent about the issues using a strictly secular language or vague references to God.

This detailed look at these explicit opinions provides further evidence that a reason these churches are appealing to some is that they help them moralise and articulate their confusing sentiments about the best way to deal with the sensitive and difficult-to-understand past. Nearly everybody in Liberia wants to forgive and forget, but Pentecostals have a clear method to enable them to do this, and clear reasons for why they should. Although explicit opinions about the TRC process reveal a lot about the way Liberians, and Pentecostals specifically, perceive the TRC, it is also helpful to consider the explicit opinions regarding issues related to the peacebuilding generally.

### *6.3.2 Opinions about major perpetrators*

Another helpful way to consider Pentecostals' perception of the TRC and transitional justice generally is to consider some specific case-studies of individuals who were involved with the war, and who in August of 2010 were still in the public eye regarding whether or not they should be punished for their actions during the war. Because of their endlessly flexible spiritual idioms, Pentecostal churches and their members generally claim to be certain about their opinions regarding the best way to deal with any perpetrator, whatever the circumstances: forgive and forget.

#### *6.3.2.1 Joshua Milton Blahyi – General Butt Naked*

Joshua Milton Blahyi is a notorious ex-combatant; much of his fame comes from the ample media attention he received as a result of his war name and tactics when he fought for ULIMO-J until 1996: ‘General Butt Naked’, leader of the ‘Butt Naked Brigade’ of young men who went into battle wearing charms and amulets, shoes, but no clothes, and believed themselves to be immune to bullets. In addition to his particularly unique tactics, Liberians also recognise him as an especially brutal figure

in the early stages of the war, particularly in the 1996 battle for Monrovia during which many people report seeing him and his men massacring fighters and civilians alike. After this battle, he had a born-again experience, quit the war, relocated to Nigeria and became an evangelist and pastor. Through the remainder of the war, he moved between Nigeria and Ghana, as it was too dangerous for him to be in Liberia. By 2007 he was returning to Liberia regularly to preach at crusades and in his own church. He became well-known as an evangelist because of his vocal testimonies about the life of evil he'd lived during the war, but that 'If Jesus saved me, he can save you too'. He also established God Bless Liberia Home, where he and a fellow ex-combatant-turned evangelist, Pastor Seakor, housed fifty ex-combatant youth who, since the war, had been living on the streets, engaging in criminal activities and abusing drugs.

Blahyi is unique in that he was one of the very few major perpetrators who voluntarily testified to atrocities he committed during the public hearings of the TRC in Monrovia. He has also been vocal about his support of the TRC process as a valuable tool for helping Liberia reconcile. All other major perpetrators, in great contrast, continually refused to take part in the proceedings; if they did testify, there were evident denials of guilt, shifting of blame and blatant lies.

What is distinct about Blahyi's confessions are the details he goes into regarding the spiritual aspects of his behaviour during the war; generally, he is adamant that he was totally under demonic control and that it wasn't *totally* he who committed these atrocities. His being taken hostage by the devil was a result of his role since childhood as a high-priest of the Krahn. This role required him to deal directly with the devil, and perform thousands of human (mostly child) sacrifices in order to

maintain power and fulfil his spiritual duties. He was so powerful, he claims, that he became Samuel Doe's spiritual advisor in the 1980s, enabling Doe to maintain power and access more through various ritual killings and other 'dark arts'. Blahyi has written five books, none of which is legal in Liberia because of the inflammatory content, but the most comprehensive is *Trading Priesthood for Royal Priesthood*<sup>10</sup>, in which he narrates his complete testimony, the details of which he repeats at every event in which he is given time to speak, including when he testified in front of the TRC.

In this testimony he highlights that during the war he killed over 20,000 people, sacrificed countless children and committed numerous other brutal and violent acts, all because of his being ruled by Satan. Parts of the testimony are worth recounting in detail because of the vivid explanations he gives about the 'dark world' that he was subject to, and the specific nature of his salvation:

*TRC: What would you say is the root of the god that you worshiped?*

*Blahyi: Devilish*

*TRC: Is this alike to the Maryland<sup>11</sup> human disappearances or sacrifice?*

*Blahyi: Exactly so, the devil is spread in different corners and he attack areas differently and the attacked are all the same.*

*TRC: Would you say that all of the political leaders who are still alive pay homage to this [god]?*

*Blahyi: Exactly so*

*TRC: Would you say that the president Doe was part of this. I mean, did he also worship the deity?*

*Blahyi: Yes, he was even one of my sub priests. We planted an altar in the mansion. If you can remember in 1990 we planted a lot of craft<sup>12</sup> around Monrovia and thought the Masonic craft was even below us and we wanted the entire cabinet member to pay homage to him.*

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<sup>10</sup> Joshua Milton Blahyi, *Trading Priesthood for Royal Priesthood. A Testimonial Account Of A Liberian Brutal War General And A Traditional Priest That Dramatically Met Christ And Is Now Christ's Ambassador*. Accra: Gee Bee Productions, 2006, in author's possession.

<sup>11</sup> Maryland is a county in South-eastern Liberia where the Bodio cult is rumoured to be active, and in which disappearances have been relatively common. It is believed that certain adherents to Bodio perform sacrifices and steal body parts for ritual power.

<sup>12</sup> These are objects believed to be imbued with certain spiritual powers.

*TRC:* Are the traditional worshipers also linked to that of the deity?

*Blahyi:* They are not linked to it, that deity is the boss in the south east. The Poro the Sande are different but they also pay homage to the devil directly or indirectly.<sup>13</sup>

While performing one of his typical human sacrifices, though, Jesus suddenly intervened. Over time, this caused him to be transformed, as Blahyi described to the TRC:

I was overwhelmed by the love and the respect when my Lord and Saviour Jesus showed me the question... A lady turned over a child to me for slaughter for the defence of the tribe. It was at that time after killing the child, then dividing the heart of the boy, that Jesus appear in the form of a white lightning, but it was brighter than the sun and my eye could not see it and I had to bow down to see this. This is what he said: "my son why are you slaving, why are you living as a slave?" Because at that time I was a king. If I give any command it must be executed and he said, "You are supposed to be a king but living as a slave". He said, "A king's servant is at the shoe but yours is at your shoulder". I never understood it [at the time] but I have been affiliating with deities and know I have been a spirit being who have been the most powerful spirit being I have ever seen. I went to fight, I held my pistol to shoot and I could not, I shot a rocket it could not. And I knew I had to leave fighting. A group came to me and said fighting was high and I went there to fight and bullet from the AK of Martina hit me three times and I was afraid I had to leave. It did not touch me but I was afraid. A group of prayer warriors called the Soul Leading Ministry came to me to pray for me saying they were sent by the Lord. They were praying for me and had a crusade called Operation Destroy Egypt. April 6 War was the day we lost a lot of generals and the people were there praying for me and after 64 days of fasting and praying the evil spirit left me.<sup>14</sup>

After this, he explains, he never fought again, even though he was approached a number of times by warlords, and instead devoted his life to spreading the gospel. More than that, Blahyi alludes how his actions helped to end the war in 2003, when he reversed a curse he'd put on the country in 1985:

[In] 1985 we recommended to Doe to plant the flag and seal at the Putu Mountain and except [unless] you pay allegiance to them you can never have peace. And in 2003 [on 20 August], I went to Putu Mountain and uprooted the

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<sup>13</sup> TRC public hearings, Monrovia, January 2008.

<sup>14</sup> TRC public hearings, Monrovia, January 2008.

flag] and we turn the flag and seal over to the church in Ghana and the country has been seen peace since then.

In short, Blahyi presents himself as a born-again hero who was under the devil's control but is now a strong fighter for Jesus. Because of this, he hopes Liberians will forgive him:

*TRC: Do you expect all Liberian to forgive you?*

*Blahyi: I am not expecting them to all forgive me but I am begging them to forgive me.*

*TRC: If anyone deems it to not accept your apology are you ready to face any prosecution?*

*Blahyi: I was told that yes TRC can recommend amnesty or prosecution. I was also told that all of these statements that I was giving to the TRC can not be used by anyone to take legal action against me. But I also know that if anyone decide to take me to task I will say everything I am saying here and it will be left to the Lord to decide whatever the court say to be what they want it to be.'*

In closing, he pleaded to the Liberian people:

First, I want to say thank you and I know that there are some of you that will be embarrassed by our presence. But logically, if a man and another got into conflict and one is telling the other that he is wrong and he will be asking for forgiveness, and the victim may not want peaceful settlement and want revenge, then the one who wants peaceful settlement is more of a victim than perpetrator. That is how I see you people; as such I want to say please forgive us and don't be deterred by our presence. I have been called by Christ and called you people champions and I will always be coming so that you can advise me on how to go forward so that the process will not be hampered. To the public I say I am sorry and not to compensate you but my wife and family have decided that the proceeds from the book I have written will be kept in an account to help people that have problem to redeem them. And to you that came here to listen to someone like me, I want to say thank you and that this process will achieve its goal to this nation.

Blahyi is resident pastor of his own church, End Time Train Evangelistic Ministries in Paynesville, Monrovia, but he also regularly is a guest preacher at crusades and revivals in and around Monrovia; his presence draws massive crowds, and many people remark that they came 'to see Blahyi'. In this setting, as opposed to the TRC, his discourse is even more graphic in the descriptions of the details of the spiritual

warfare in which he is involved; generally his full testimony, as quoted in his book, is given over the course of fifteen to twenty minutes. His mantra in all of it is, ‘If God forgave me, He can forgive you too’; whenever he says those words, the crowds he is speaking to erupts in cheers and applause. He is undoubtedly a popular figure on the Liberian Christian scene. It is worth considering a few Pentecostal opinions of him in detail. For many Pentecostals, not only is he popular, but he is considered to be a hero, a role model to emulate, and a peacemaker. As one man said:

Oh, Blahyi, I love that man, he gets up there and he can preach! He did so many bad, bad things during the war but look at him now, he is changed! He is truly changed! The power of God is great, look what He did for Blahyi, if he did if for that Butt Naked, he will do it for anybody.

A young member of Blahyi’s church said,

I love him; he is like a Jesus to me. Without Blahyi I would still be on the streets, doing crime, doing drugs. He saved me, and he saved so many other people too. He is a man of God and he is so great for this country.

A young woman from Winners’ explained,

That man he really speaks to the people. He knows what they went through, especially those young boys. So he can talk to them, introduce them to Christ, and he can say, “Look, Christ changed me” and so those boys they have faith that Christ will change them too.

When asked about whether or not Blahyi deserves punishment for his crimes, every Pentecostal interviewed during fieldwork said he did not; to legitimate this opinion, spiritual idioms were always used. For example, a woman from CEPC said:

That General Butt Naked, I knew him, I seen him with my eye, April 6 War. I saw him. Right in Mamba Point here. He caused too much trouble, bad, bad man in those times. But I have forgive him, because why? That was war, the wickedness was too much, God was not in control there, so it was a difficult time... Now we have peace so we all should forgive him. He’s a pastor now! Those he did bad to, they already forgive him. They know that now he has Christ, so he is not a wicked man anymore... They need him to do what he’s supposed to do through the pastoring work, to do good to those he did bad to before, so we can not stop his good work.

Similarly, a member of Winners' explained,

He is truly born again, I know him well, we are friends together, we fought together. They called me general Blazo. But that time is passed. Blahyi, when he was in the war, he was in the spirit of the war. And what he did was inside him, was giving him a hard time because what he wanted to live in the spirit of the war. When he got born again, the wicked things came out of him, and God used him to be a person to come out and confess. That is why he came out to confess to the Liberian people, to tell them what all he did. But not everybody should be like Blahyi, if God does not call them to do it, so like, I will not confess to the people about the wicked things we did... I did that with God and he forgave me, but Blahyi he has a special calling, he is doing so great! He talks a lot on the past but that is his job, he is helping others. Like, he has a good foundation for all of the ex-soldiers, ex-fighters, some of these child soldiers like to listen to him; he has some acre of land and he is going to build, on Barclay highway, like a camp for 4-5000 ex-combatants, having some training for them, putting it there, counseling class, he told me that.

Pastor Benda of SUPC applied spiritual idioms differently to explain Blahyi's punishment:

If this man were indicted to face the war crimes court, that's the right of the state. I will not disagree. But he is saved. He has come to the Lord. If he is truly saved, God will know how to deliver him from that. God will save him from there. If he has to die because of what he did, so what; he is saved anyway! So he's got nothing to lose! But [when it comes to] the state, and justice, one philosopher said... Peace is not only the absence of conflict but the presence of justice. Do you understand? So, if that is what the state decides, then we must accept it. It is in God's hands, and whatever happens will be God's will.

The point being made with the quotations above is that there are a variety of ways that Liberian Pentecostals use spiritual idioms to articulate why Blahyi should be forgiven and, even if he faces secular punishment, why this should be viewed as a part of God's plan. Liberian opinions generally were similar to those of Pentecostals – many saw him as a truly reformed individual who put down his gun and was doing what he could to make up for the wickedness of his past. Very few Liberians I spoke to considered it necessary for Blahyi to be punished for his crimes. He was clearly popular among Liberians generally; walking down the main street of Monrovia with

him took nearly an hour because so many people insisted on shaking his hand, saying hello or asking him to pray with them. He told me: ‘Some people on the other side [West] think that I’m some scary person, but look, there is nothing to be afraid of. Liberians know that I am a changed man, so I can just walk down the street and there is no problem’.

That Blahyi is such a popular figure in Liberia is evidently surprising to many Western observers. Ample criticism has been launched against the TRC Final Report which recommends Blahyi for amnesty, specifically because he cooperated with the process and was fully repentant and honest about what he had done. In response to this recommendation, all the pastors of the churches under consideration said almost verbatim that, ‘God has granted him amnesty because he is truly changed and blessed. God has a job for Joshua and the TRC has realised that too’.

In sum, with the figure of Joshua Blahyi, we are dealing with three themes. First, Blahyi legitimised his actions during the war, and actions since the war, in terms of the spiritual battle between good and evil. Because of the wicked life he had before, he is able to highlight just *how much* he has changed, and just *how much* power he has as a result of this profound transformation. So much, in fact, that he was able to reverse a powerful curse that was a major factor in ending the war. Second, Blahyi is an example of an honest and repentant ex-combatant, exactly what the TRC was striving to achieve from all ex-combatants in the country. Third, Blahyi is a very popular figure among all Liberians, not just Pentecostals; all believe his crimes should be forgiven and forgotten. Pentecostals explain this in spiritual idioms and they can easily legitimise the difficult moral decision they must make for forgiving

such a man; Liberians generally agree that he should be forgiven, but their reasons for why tend to be more vague or they admit that such a decision is difficult to make.

### 6.3.2.2 Prince Yormie Johnson

Prince Johnson is the ex-leader of INPFL, a breakaway group from Taylor's NPFL, and the man responsible for overseeing the torture and execution of then-President Samuel Doe. He is widely known to have been a 'drunken psychopath' during the early stages of the war, who was suspected of cannibalising Doe, an act that is believed to imbue the person with incredible power. He wrote and distributed a tract titled, 'The Guns that Liberate us Cannot Rule', though it seemed most of his ambitions were for executive power. Despite his faction's initial success, and concurrent notoriety, it fell apart soon after and he left the country for Ghana. While in Ghana he 'found Christ' and became a pastor. He remained involved in Liberian politics from afar, and returned to Liberia in 2005 to win a seat as Nimba County Senior Senator, for which he won a huge majority despite only ten days of campaigning under his own new party after falling out with Johnson-Sirleaf's Unity Party. In a 2006 interview with the BBC, Johnson said of his election, "I said, people of Nimba don't forget yesterday. God used me as an instrument to save you. So choose between those who ran away and I, Prince Johnson, who give my life for you."<sup>15</sup> Since his election, only very periodically were there media stories criticising his political power, despite his past. Through 2008, however, he began to receive attention because of his perpetual refusals to sit in front of the TRC, where his testimony was clearly expected because of his prominent role in the war. In a number

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<sup>15</sup> 'Meeting the hard man of Liberia', BBC News, 4 November 2006. See also Glenna Gordon, 'An Interview with Senator Prince Johnson of Liberia', *Foreign Policy*, July 2009.

of public statements he denied any involvement with the death of Doe, and talked about the war only when directly confronted about it, and then he would make a variety of excuses for his actions or change the subject. For example, in February 2008 he alluded to his lack of responsibility in the early stages of the war, and said that if he was involved at all, he was being ‘used’:

The death of Doe was planned amongst some powerful Western countries and our politicians. To prove this, Doe was still a sitting president when Dr. Amos Sawyer, Bishop Michael Francis, Ronald Diggs and several others with the support of those Western countries formed the Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU), aimed at indirectly over throwing Doe's government.

After much encouragement, and probably realising that the TRC could force him to testify anyway, he finally told his story at the TRC public hearings in August 2008. There he admitted that he and his men had killed Doe and that he regretted it; however, he reiterated that he was being ‘used’, but would not name by whom specifically:

They sat in exile and formed an interim government to replace the Doe government when Doe was still on the throne... I was only the instrument that they used... We all were involved in this Samuel Doe matter... We all wanted a change.

However, he denied reports that he and his men had cannibalised Doe, and claimed that they exhumed his body in order to show the media that the man was truly dead, to avoid rumours claiming otherwise. Despite numerous victim and witness testimonies to the contrary, he denied ever killing any civilian himself, and denied ever condoning his fighters to kill or injure civilians, aside from cases where, for example, he executed two of his men who had ‘violated the human rights’ of a civilian. He stressed during his testimony that, ‘We need to forgive each other for

what happened in this country,’ and opposed any establishment of a Liberian war crimes court. The closest he came to a confession and apology, to this author’s knowledge, was when he said: ‘Forgive me for my sins, but when two elephants fight, the grass suffers.<sup>16</sup> Since his TRC testimony, he has repeatedly made public claims that if he were recommended for prosecution by the TRC, he would ‘refuse to be arrested’. When his name appeared on the top of the list of major perpetrators in the final report, written as ‘Number One most notorious perpetrator’, unsurprisingly to most people, he repeated his threats that he would refuse arrest, and more ominously that if any attempts were made to arrest him, ‘there will be trouble’. He also repeatedly referred to a law that Charles Taylor passed in 2003, again stressing that the TRC was totally illegitimate. He and most of the other ex-warlords who signed the CPA held a tense press conference in which they categorically denied the legitimacy of the TRC, both because of this law and because it was dangerous for Liberia’s peace.

In addition to frequently alluding to God’s role during his campaign for Senator, Johnson still refers to the role God plays in his life, now that he is not fighting, though, contrary to Blahyi’s graphic testimonies, he is still careful to avoid conceding too much about his past. Reflecting on his testimony to the TRC, and highlighting one reason he does not deserve prosecution, Johnson insisted that, ‘I was repentant. I’ve accepted Jesus.<sup>17</sup> He has been a well-known member of Winners’ Chapel, since his return to Liberia in 2005, and a self-proclaimed evangelist of the Gospel, though, to this author’s knowledge, he has never preached in public since returning to Liberia.

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<sup>16</sup> Gordon, ‘Interview’.  
<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

Unlike Blahyi's graphic testimonies about his involvement with the dark world, Johnson generally only vaguely refers to his 'transformation' having become born again and that he is fulfilling a special mandate of God by being in office. To this author's knowledge, since returning to Liberia he has never preached at Winners' Chapel, nor spoken about his involvement during the war either in his own church or any other.

Among Pentecostals, Johnson is not considered to be the hero that Blahyi is. However, he is admired for his evident change from fighting to peaceful, God-fearing politician:

He was a wicked man then, everybody knew him... You drive past Freeport and you see him sitting there, drinking all day, and he'd just have his boys kill people because he didn't like how they looked. People feared him-o! He came back a transformed man, he stopped with the drink and he is a man of God. He was preaching on that side [Ghana]... He came back to be a Senator and he is doing fine, I voted for him... So I think it is a good thing that someone who was so wicked can change his ways, to show the other people that you can live a wicked life but come back and still be alright.

When asked about Johnson's continuous denial of his crimes, and refusal to truly repent for them in public, Pentecostals gave explanations in spiritual idioms. As one Winners' member explained,

It is not a matter of his confession to man. If he confessed to God, then who am I to fault him for not confessing to the TRC? He says he is born-again, he is not doing any crime now so I cannot fault him for this. His heart is with God, and that is all that matters.

Similarly, a member of CEPC said that,

We believe in justice, but we also believe in forgiveness... So what I believe is that if somebody, one way or the other, decided to leave this life for the Lord, then I don't think there is anything better for him... If he doesn't repent, what we

know is that his sin will find him out, and the wages of sin is death. They say evil will also pursue the sin. So we leave them to their own judgment.

In terms of his possible prosecution, Pentecostals insist that, as with Blahyi, such a prosecution is not necessary; at worst it could incite more tension, and instead ‘we should just forgive and forget’:

He is now a man of God; he has changed his ways and is transformed, so we cannot punish him now. What will that do? Too many people did bad, why should we go and punish the good ones? Johnson did bad but for Liberia, it would be bad to open old wounds... Now he is a peaceful man, he is not fighting, so what is the problem?

So, despite the considerably different situation of Prince Johnson as compared to Blahyi – the former is born-again but unrepentant, in denial and far less vocal – Pentecostals still found spiritual idioms that he should be forgiven and forgotten, and should not be prosecuted or even restricted from office. The fact that he openly criticises the TRC as illegitimate was not problematic for anyone interviewed during fieldwork; instead, all that mattered was that he had become man of God, and it was now up to God to deal with him. The confession and repentance, they believe, has occurred between him and God; that he is a reformed individual is evident in the fact that he is no longer waging war. The confession and repentance that has *not* occurred between him and the TRC, or the Liberian state generally, is irrelevant to Pentecostals.

The general Liberian opinion of Johnson is more ambivalent than that of Blahyi. Many people do recognise the injustice of his being able to hold high political office despite his notoriously brutal past. However, even those who consider the man a ‘psychopath’ or even still a ‘wicked man, demon-possessed’, still see the benefit in

simply letting ‘bygones be bygones’ and moving on. However, they recognise the dilemma here. In trying to deal with the dilemma, they utilise a variety of explanations that are much less certain than those presented by Pentecostals who use spiritual idioms. A few examples will suffice:

Oh, the Johnson case it is difficult. The man, he did so many bad things, it just makes me angry, and now he is sitting there, big man in power. Oh! I know he is not making war now, and it is peaceful, but we can just let this man have power? He really needs to be brought to justice, to pay for what he did. But if you do that, oh, I know plenty of boys who will fight to free him, and then what happens? War! So it is difficult, it makes me feel bad but we just should leave him there. I don’t know if I support a criminal court.

Johnson, yeah, that man he is not right, he just fought for power, he killed for power and look, he got power. But if we take the power away, it will be bad for Liberia, so let him keep it. This country has so many problems, no justice, no rule of law, criminals are in power, but what can I do? We have peace, I am not running, so just let bygones be bygones.

Others are fully supportive of Johnson, but again, are not specific about why:

Yeah, he is a good leader, a revolutionary! He fought in the war, [did wicked things], yeah, but so did everybody, you can’t blame him for what everybody did. He is the scapegoat for too many of the problems... So he fought for Liberia with the gun during the war time, because if he had no gun then what happen? He would have lost! So now there is no gun, so he is alright.

Prince Johnson, he just gets too much attention because he was on that video. There were plenty other boys doing bad things, but they aren’t on video. What are they doing, they still out there, nobody tells them, ‘Oh you go to TRC, oh you go to Hague’, because they were as wicked as Johnson but maybe they just got no attention. So we let them carry on with their business. Let us allow Johnson to carry on with his business.

To revisit the themes addressed with respect to Blahyi, in dealing with Johnson we see that first, as with Blahyi, spiritual idioms are used by Pentecostals in order to articulate why it is that his crimes should be forgiven and forgotten. These spiritual idioms differ slightly, though. More often they explain how Johnson has ‘made things right with God’ in his own time, evident in his being openly born-again, and therefore

it is not problematic that he has not publicly repented or admitted to his crimes. Many non-Pentecostal Liberians are ambivalent about Johnson's impunity; the practical thing to do with him, they agree, is to leave him alone. Pentecostals legitimise this opinion in spiritual terms and increasingly complex spiritual idioms; non-Pentecostals are more ambivalent, vague and generally acknowledge that the situation is 'difficult'.

#### 6.3.2.3 Charles Taylor

Charles Taylor, beginning in 2008, is being tried for a number of crimes against international law that he committed in Sierra Leone in the Special Court for Sierra Leone, a hybrid court that was located in Sierra Leone for every trial except his, which, in an attempt to maintain stability in the country, was moved to a rented ICC chamber in the Hague. He has become a relatively common name because, in 2003, he became the first sitting head of state to be indicted by this court. As of 2010 he has not been indicted for any crimes committed in Liberia, and never gave testimony in the Liberian TRC because of his ongoing trial in the Hague. Despite that, he is well-known among every Liberian for his major involvement throughout the war, his brutal presidency and his persistent refusal to claim responsibility for any war crimes, or even relatively minor violent acts, and an explicit refusal to apologise for anything. Unlike Blahyi and Johnson, Taylor is not a self-professed, born-again Christian. Throughout the 1990s, he did make such claims, even hosting a massive three-day prayer and fast revival for Liberia in 2002. However, most Liberians recognised that his claims to be born-again were false, especially because of his 1997 self-declaration as the supreme head of the Poro – including declaring that he would have three wives

– a position totally counter to Pentecostal ideals. Since his indictment he has not claimed to be born-again; while on trial in The Hague, he even testified to having converted to Judaism, yet had ‘not given up Christianity’.<sup>18</sup>

Although they are certain that Taylor was a major instigator of the wars, and is evidently not sorry for them, most Pentecostals are still willing to ‘forgive and forget’, and do not see the need for him to be convicted of any crimes. Again, the spiritual idioms that are used in order to explain why it is best to ‘forgive and forget’ Taylor’s crimes, and the proper methods to deal with him, vary widely. There are a number of factors that make these spiritual idioms more complex, contradictory and varied than those that deal with Blahyi and Johnson, first, because of the Pentecostal perception that Taylor is not born-again or truly saved; second because of the fact that he *is* currently dealing with the possibility of punishment. For example, one Winners’ pastor pointed out that God would work through the justice system to do His will:

Let Taylor face his judgment. One thing I know is that God doesn’t hold back any man. If you are willing to change your life then he is willing to forgive. God will let the innocent go free. If Taylor really confessed [to God], and Taylor is sure [and truthful] of what he’s saying, God will forgive him. If he then gets sent to jail then that is not God’s work... God will not send a repentant man to jail... If he goes to jail it is because he did not confess to God, and God has put him there until he changes his ways.

Another pastor also believed that God would work through the justice system, but quite differently: ‘If Taylor gets convicted, then it is God’s will, perhaps he will be there [jail] in order to make him see Christ, and then he can spread the gospel to those in his prison’.

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<sup>18</sup> In June 2009, Taylor was reported by his wife to have converted to Judaism, yet had not ‘given up’ Christianity in doing so. ‘Religious Conversion’, BBC Radio Interview with Mrs. Victoria Taylor, 2 June 2009,

While acknowledging the possibility that Taylor might be punished for his crimes, many Pentecostals were still adamant that he should not be. Again, a variety of spiritual idioms were employed in order to articulate this sentiment. Some Pentecostals considered the prosecution of Taylor to be useless, as the real action should be performed in the spiritual realm:

Yeah, we know [Taylor] caused the war, he was the hand behind it all, he brought Liberia down, he caused too much wickedness, but what good will it do to put him in jail? The man is too powerful, he can do things from his prison room. The devil is not stopped with bars and guards, the devil is stopped with a true change, so if we want to keep Taylor's threat away, we must continue to pray for him. We pray for him every day, to make him to truly see Christ, to repent and to change... It is working now, you see it, we have peace because we prayed. We fought the devil. If we stop doing that, we will see war again.

God has a hand over this country now, so he will not let Charles Taylor take it back again, He cannot let war happen again. Charles Taylor had control before, the devil was everywhere and the man was a supreme Zoe, so he had all kinds of forces of darkness working with him, but they are less now... So if we let Charles Taylor go or if we put him in jail there is no difference. So I think for everybody, all those warlord, we let bygones be bygones and we just let Taylor free.

Others saw his prosecution as dangerous:

Well, it is difficult with Taylor, you see he is not with Christ, that man he is too demonic, he is working with Satan. So we are just giving Satan more and more power with this Hague business, put him on television, give him a chance to talk, talk, talk all these things. The man is lying! You see it every day, lies, lies! That is the devil speaking, so what is the good here? The devil is preaching through Charles Taylor, we need to intervene properly... Deliverance will be the only way to start this process. You know, he was the supreme Zoe. You know, that is like the general of Satan's army... He still holds rank, and he is in jail but he still goes to the spirit world and does business whenever he wants, so what are we wasting time for [with prosecution]... Right now he cannot cause harm because the Pentecostals are being active against him, so we are trying, but there is much more work to do... I forgive him, I have to forgive him before I can pray for him, but we as a nation need to fast and pray for that man.

You know they are showing the trial on television and talking about it in the radio and newspapers, so all these stories being told, about eating babies and raping women and burning villages... That is making people feel bad, and that is making people remember the past and it can make people vexed... So this is causing confusion and what good is that in our country today? The devil knows that when

you talk about him, he can get power. What we need to say is the blood of Jesus, and that will stop all these tensions. [Whenever we are] talking about the dark world business, the devil loves it... If Taylor goes down or not, nothing will change, so we need to pray continuously that this trial doesn't cause more problems.

For Pentecostals, the best way to deal with Taylor, instead of or in addition to the Special Court proceedings, is through prayer, deliverance and evangelism. Putting him on trial, accusing him of war crimes and being against him will not change him in the way that will be most effective for achieving the ultimate goal of true reconciliation. If Charles Taylor has not repented or confessed, no formal court or TRC will encourage him to do so; the only thing that will is a true experience with God; only the church can do this.

The general Liberian opinion is supportive of not convicting Charles Taylor as well – although evidently less certain than they are about giving amnesty to Blahyi or Johnson. Like Johnson, however, many Liberians want to give Taylor amnesty not necessarily because they believe he deserves it, or because they even like him as a leader or individual, but mainly because they consider leaving the issue alone to ultimately be better for Liberia. Again, frequent mention about how his war crimes trial, in addition to all of the testimony given about him in the Liberian TRC, is simply ‘opening old wounds’ that could reignite tension.

At the same time, Liberians are fully aware that for some things, it is important to punish somebody for crimes, in the name of justice and rule of law. There is also the reality that many people are simply afraid that he will re-involve himself with Liberian politics and potential power grabs. Ultimately, people are faced with a difficult decision about whether or not to support the prosecution of a man they fear and blame for the destruction of the country, yet want to forget about and try to

maintain the peace that they have finally achieved. Because of this complicated moral and practical decision when speaking about the best way to deal with Taylor, Liberians are ambivalent and unsure about their opinions and the reasons for them. However, many people stick to their general feeling that whatever happened during the war should be ‘forgiven and forgotten’ for the sake of Liberia’s peace. Pentecostals, by contrast, are certain of this opinion because, according to their spiritual worldview, dealing with Taylor and Liberia’s peace generally can be achieved only in the spiritual realm. The difficult moral decision is legitimised when situated within the spiritual battle; the issue is effectively resolved. As we have seen in the case of Taylor, these idioms become increasingly complex when the problem is more difficult to legitimise in non-spiritual terms.

### *6.3.3 Flexibility*

To summarise, Pentecostal opinions about these three very different figures are a good representation of the wide applicability of their spiritual idioms in order to explain the actions of these individuals, and consolidate their opinions as to the best way to deal with them. Blahyi has publically confessed, repented and begged for forgiveness from the Liberian public, and made major attempts to ‘give back’ to the country through his evangelisation efforts, support of the TRC, public speeches, and programmes for re-integration and reform of ex-combatants. Johnson has half-heartedly confessed to and apologised for a few crimes, certainly not all that he has been accused of, only under evident pressure, but has not asked for forgiveness and has blamed his actions on those in power above him. Charles Taylor, along with

most other major perpetrators<sup>19</sup>, have denied any wrongdoing, not asked for forgiveness, not repented, and not made any claims to be born-again and reformed from a ‘dark past’.

Despite this wide variety of Pentecostal spiritual idioms employed when dealing with perpetrators, all these idioms have one common spiritual explanation: the perpetrators’ actions during the war were a consequence of the spiritual battle between good and evil which had brought Liberia into total spiritual disorder. However, since then, there has been a relative re-ordering of the spirit world, manifest as relative peace. Whatever wickedness these men did was a result of their being under the control of Satan, to various degrees, at the time they were doing it. Blahyi spells this out literally; for Pentecostals, he is speaking their language and therefore, is a perfect role model for post-conflict reconciliation, peace and reintegration. In other words, he is an example of spiritual re-order, manifest in an individual’s drastic personal transformation. The others may not put such transformations in such explicit terms, but their present-day actions reflect a lesser demonic influence: today, these men are not waging war. The physical evidence is that they are not *as* wicked as they were before; therefore, there must less demonic influence at work.

The applicability of spiritual idioms does not end here, though. As the following section will show, the flexible and adaptable discourse is able to spiritually legitimise situations in which it is most practical to *not* forgive.

#### ***6.4 Non-reconciliation and spiritual disorder***

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<sup>19</sup> The other ‘most notorious’ are George Boley, Alhaji Kromah, Thomas Nimley, Sekou Damante Konneh and two others who have since died: Roosevelt Johnson, Francois Massaquoi. Also, many of the 98 on the ‘Most Notorious Perpetrators’ list did not confess or apologise and, if they did, it was perceived by the TRC to have been illegitimate, hence their recommendation for prosecution. There were 36 people not recommended for prosecution. TRC Final Report 2009, 268-69; 332-333.

#### *6.4.1 Peace on what grounds?*

This section will examine the ways Pentecostals deal with forgiveness in issues not directly related to the war. We will see how Pentecostals use spiritual idioms to legitimise *not* forgiving or accepting certain fellow Pentecostals who repeatedly behave badly, despite the wrongdoer's admission of guilt and repentance. From the previous section, it would seem that, like the perpetrators, they would be perpetually forgiven and given more chances to redeem themselves. The reality, however, is that when it is practical or desirable, Pentecostals often find spiritual idioms to explain why certain people are simply a 'lost cause' or that they need to 'let them go' in order to really help them. Such explanations were common throughout all the churches; to make the point, two examples will suffice.

##### **6.4.1.1 Non-forgiveness**

Three months after working for me, my research assistant Emmanuel travelled with CHRISEM to their Buchanan week-long crusade. He had been working as a generator mechanic for the church for those three months, which required him to travel everywhere with the church and sleep overnight on the crusade grounds with a few other workers to guard the equipment. On the first day in Buchanan, Emmanuel met a young woman in town and spent the night with her. Of course, this was strictly forbidden moral behaviour, in addition to irresponsibly abandoning his job. The next day when he finally returned, a pastor's phone was missing and everyone concluded that Emmanuel had stolen it to give to his new girlfriend. Because of this behaviour, Emmanuel was asked to leave the crusade, and was given money for a taxi to return to Monrovia. Before he left, the pastors asked him to give them my camera, which

Emmanuel had been using to take pictures for the church; at this point, the pastors later told me, he became aggressive and refused to give it back.

When the pastors returned to Monrovia, Emmanuel called one of the pastors of the church, his distant cousin, to apologise and ask for forgiveness, and to volunteer himself to undergo deliverance to ‘change my wicked ways’. The pastor said he would call him later, but never did. When Emmanuel called him again a week later, the pastor said quite frankly, ‘You are not welcome here anymore’. I asked the pastors about this, and they explained the reasons for this decision to not allow Emmanuel to return: it was not just that it was immoral and sinful to have premarital sex, but more importantly that, ‘This is a deliverance ministry, and when Emmanuel leaves the crusade ground, he goes out there, into the demonic stronghold, and he can bring the demons back in to the people at the crusade ground.’ The church leaders then told me about Emmanuel’s history at the church – he had been a member since he was a boy. Apparently he had always been a ‘bad boy’, had frequently been a problem for the church, and that ‘the only reason we let him back is because he was with you’. However, when it became apparent that Emmanuel would still be a practical inconvenience for the church, they asked him to leave and legitimised and articulated this decision in spiritual idioms – that his demons were too dangerous for the well-being of the church.

#### 6.4.1.2 Some are transformed; others are pretending

Similar sentiments were found among members of Winners’ chapel, including some of the leadership. Winners’ periodically evangelise ‘rogues’ to try to get them to give their lives to Christ and leave their criminal activity. In order to get their

attention, they often offer them small amounts of money, food, clothing, and sometimes a chance to live with another congregation member – this is all dependant on their maintaining good behaviour and seriously committing to the church. One particular group that Winners' has sought out are the motorbike drivers who are generally believed to be ex-combatants; many of them have indeed joined Winners' Chapel and in return for financial support, they wear vests advertising for the church. Some of these individuals, however, are on drugs or are reluctant to leave their criminal lives behind, but continue to come to the church and accept charity. This is viewed with evident disdain by members. For example one man who works in the 'technical unit' showed me a photo of a group of young men, clearly intoxicated, and told me,

These boys, they go out, do drugs, come to the church and say, "Give me another chance, I'm sorry I will be good this time", so the church, we give them money, and then they go immediately to buy more drugs. They do it again and again, they cannot be changed; it is a waste. Instead the church can be helping people who are serious.

As I was speaking to these Winners' members on Broad Street, two young men came up to me whom I recognised from Winners'. They were still clearly addicted to drugs, and admitted to me that they were only surviving through criminal activities and begging. One of them explained that they loved Winners' because, 'they keep letting me come back, because I am trying, but it is difficult to change', and that he understood why other church members might be growing tired of him and his friends' failure to truly change. They asked me for money, one to buy food and the other so he could visit family up-country; before I had a chance to answer, the other men from Winners' told them to 'Stop embarrassing the girl, go away', and they left. Again, the other men from Winners' reiterated, 'Nothing you can do will help them, they will

take your money and go buy more drugs'. I somewhat facetiously asked them if that was the best way to evangelise to those in need, and one man said, 'Sometimes you need to know when you shouldn't waste time on people who are too far gone [on the side of Satan]. You can't talk to criminals and rogues; you just need to stay away from them'.

## **6.5 Discussion**

### *6.5.1 Spiritually legitimate and practical contradictions*

The Pentecostal churches are situating themselves in Liberian society as the most serious venue – spiritual and physical – in which these physical realities are given some sense and meaning with recourse to spiritual idioms. Therefore, they are attempting to provide some control the situation. However, the nature of religion in Liberia, including Pentecostalism, is no different. It is fluid, dynamic and chronically open to multiple interpretations and methods of interaction. Even the Pentecostal discourse, which tries to be clear and dualistic in its interpretation of physical events, still enables, and even contributes to, the complex array of spiritual idioms to account for these realities. If given a chance, any religious ideology will do this; in Liberia, it is the Pentecostals who have been the most relevant and practical for the people.

Though Pentecostal churches differ in the frequency and specific manner in which they address these issues, when compared to any other religious or secular group they are far more explicit about dealing with the evils that have caused so much pain in suffering during and since the war. For Pentecostals, other religious groups do not explain enough, nor do they provide enough encouragement that the situation can be changed. Nor do they stress the seriousness of the spiritual war in which they are

engaged which, confusing as it is, can always be addressed using Pentecostal discourses.

The data presented throughout this thesis have demonstrated the particular form that Pentecostal spiritual idioms have taken due to Liberia's current post-conflict conditions which require attention. Since the country is totally lacking in any rational-legal mechanisms of doing this, and the breakdown in education over the last twenty years has disabled average Liberians from thinking in these terms or having political or economic power to influence events even if they could think in these terms, these idioms and the spiritual activities *become* the reality for people. Not only does it give them *some* type of discourse with which they can begin to understand the war and subsequent events, it also gives them the necessary moral component to make this discourse more relevant and meaningful than any others that might be available. It also ensures that they can feel that they play an active role in their fate and the fate of Liberia.

### ***6.6 Conclusion***

A few points have been made in this chapter: first, popular perceptions about the TRC tend to be ambivalent at best, and most people consider it more important to simply ‘forgive and forget’ whatever happened during the war; second, popular peculiar to Pentecostals as compared to Liberians generally; what is distinct about Pentecostals are the ways that they articulate the reasons for their opinions and the specific alternatives they propose to the secular initiatives; third, the difference between the ways Pentecostals deal with individuals and groups depends not strictly on the doctrines they are taught in church, but rather depends on the physical context

in which believers find themselves, just as non-Pentecostal Liberians will shift their opinions regarding certain issues, though without legitimising their reasons by referring to spiritual idioms as Pentecostals do.

The data presented in this chapter further suggest that the Pentecostal worldview, as has been reiterated throughout this thesis – adaptable, unclear and complex, so that it can be applied a wide variety of situations – is not world-creating, but rather world-affirming. In Liberia, people are confused about how to deal with the war and the people who acted in it. This is not odd; nobody has answers to Liberia's problems and every issue is complicated. However, the Pentecostal discourse enables people to consolidate their opinions about what the best method is, and therefore makes it legitimate and spiritually clear. However, that is just the war; when it comes to present-day problems with criminals and immorality, Pentecostals are less likely to forgive and forget, specifically because the situation they are faced with is impractical or undesirable if forgiveness or acceptance is involved. This chapter has revealed how Pentecostals do not always adhere to their ideals of forgiveness, reconciliation and love for all. It is clear that forgiveness or non-forgiveness is the variable; practicality is the constant.

Pentecostals articulate, perceive and act upon this-worldly events using spiritual idioms; so, in dealing with the past and the future, the spirit world is the place to look. Regarding the TRC, justice and reconciliation, Pentecostals do not really think about the TRC's role in effectively achieving these goals; instead they would like to forgive and forget; justice, in dealing with the war, will not make the wounds of the war go away, and will not necessarily deter people from doing bad things again. What will make the wounds of the war go away, and not return, is in the nation's taking Jesus

first. If courts became a reality, then Pentecostals would not fight against them – nor would Liberians generally – but Pentecostals will be able to tap into spiritual idioms to explain why this is so, and how it is best addressed, while Liberians generally will have a much smaller vocabulary with which to deal with these increasingly difficult and morally complex issues.

These points were made to lead to the analysis in the following chapter, which will consider the extent to which Pentecostal alternatives and ways of perceiving peacebuilding and reconciliation are effective in achieving the same goals as the typically-relied upon methods for transitional justice (whether retributive, via international or domestic courts, or whether restorative, via TRCs or ‘traditional justice mechanisms’), and on what logic these alternatives are based. The chapter will not judge whether Pentecostal methods are better or worse, but it will provide insights into the specific ways Pentecostals and by implication, Liberians generally, perceive the issues surrounding transitional justice. This will provide a new but, I argue, critical approach to understanding post-conflict interventions. The thesis argues that understanding fully is an indispensable first step.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### *A socio-political role*

#### **7.1 Alternative Method for Peacebuilding**

We have seen in Liberian context that the Pentecostal churches' explicit socio-political role is clearly quite limited – they tend to avoid formal social and political involvement – and that the churches do not have a coherent or consistent theology that systematically influences or instructs believers' behaviour and thoughts – Pentecostals do not necessarily sin less than non-Pentecostals. This is not to say, however, that the Pentecostal worldview does not have other socio-political implications. The remainder of the chapter will go through some examples of how Pentecostal churches, leaders or individuals achieved, as an unintended consequence of their spiritual worldview, the same goals that the TRC has attempted and, in many cases, failed to achieve. Specifically, the Pentecostal churches provide their members with spiritual idioms with which they articulate and act upon the issues they are facing. These spiritual idioms, it will be seen, help people to reconcile with those who hurt them, forgive all others generally, give their testimony, reintegrate themselves and prove that they have undergone a personal transformation, and have hope for the future.

It is necessary to briefly revisit the major debates concerning the relative effectiveness of retributive versus restorative transitional justice mechanisms in addition to the relative effectiveness of universal versus local initiatives for peace and reconciliation. The Liberian TRC, and TRCs generally, are theoretically restorative and often considered to be more 'locally based' or 'culturally sensitive' alternatives to

international courts and even Western-inspired domestic justice systems that are theoretically retributive and based upon a universalistic understanding of law, justice and, increasingly, human rights. As shown in chapter three, TRCs are in actuality imposed, funded, influenced and overseen to various degrees by institutions or individuals with a Western foundation. More than that, they are not necessarily restorative, if one can even claim to know what TRCs are trying to restore. The realisation that TRCs are not as ‘local’ or ‘restorative’ as they are intended to be gives even more reason to argue that they are an ineffective method of transitional justice in terms of their value in promoting social healing. Acknowledging the reasons for these limitations of the TRC, this chapter asks: to what extent can we consider Pentecostal churches to be more effective peacebuilders in post-conflict Liberia?

I will not argue that Pentecostals are peacebuilders because it is demanded by the churches, or posited as part of the ‘Pentecostal ideal’ in their preaching. While it occasionally is preached about, this is not why Pentecostals will act in ways that are good for peace. As we have seen throughout this thesis, we cannot assume that Pentecostals practise everything that is preached; when they do not, these transgressions are explained in spirit idioms. Thus, I will argue that the instances in which Pentecostals appear to be peacebuilders are actually unintended consequences of their thoughts and actions concerning the battle between good and evil; the end goal is not peace and reconciliation, as it is with the TRC. Therein lies the unique power of Pentecostalism.

### *7.1.1 Personal reconciliation*

The reasons why Pentecostals forgive those who hurt them are primarily explained in spiritual idioms. Within single congregations, there are undoubtedly wartime ‘enemies’ who either fought for or actively supported opposing factions. However, such tensions are alleviated simply by virtue of both those individuals claiming to be fighting for the same side – Christ. This is useful for both sides, but the victim especially is able to find a reason to forgive. As one Winners’ member explained:

You know, in this church there are plenty boys that fought. Some people here had family members killed by someone who is sitting right next to them. Many of these guys are even friends with one another today, after fighting before... Some of the Big Men during the war are here, like Prince Johnson. Oh! He hurt plenty of people-o! Myself included! But we have to forgive them [major perpetrators] because they are here and they don’t cause problems. So they come to church, we don’t ask questions [about their past] but we make sure they are true to the faith and that is all we need. So, we forgive them. They have made things right with God so the only way we can help them is to forgive them and pray for them... If we chastise them then they will just go back to their wicked ways.

Sis. Margaret of SUPC explained similarly,

‘Ah, there are plenty of people who sit here every week who fought, and they fought for different armies... Ten years ago they would be shooting each other, some of these boys they’d be raping the women... This man he burned that man’s house... [There was] too much conflict in that time! But here, now, everybody is at peace, and they come to church, sit down together, nobody has a problem. Why? Because they are all on the same side now, they are on God’s side and when you are on God’s side, you are fighting a common enemy now: that is the devil. So this is where the real peace happens, when you unite to fight the devil!’

One member of CEPC gave a testimony,

‘I fought in the war, I did wicked things... When the fighting stopped I had nothing, and I knew I did bad things so I didn’t think anybody would accept me, my family rejected me during the war because I did drugs. I was a wicked son. But I came here to CEPC, there were people here who I knew from the war time, I had hurt them, but I didn’t even ask and they forgave me. So I am standing here to say that I thank you for forgiving me, and you know I am truly sorry for what I

did, and if it were not for the forgiving grace of God and you people who work for him, I don't know where I would be today'.

Nearly everyone was affected, somehow, by one warring faction or another; in Monrovia it is nearly impossible to avoid these people in day-to-day interactions. Within the church, though, reconciliation and a 'forgiving heart' is not only demanded of good Christians, but the importance of forgiveness is put into spiritual terms. Most generally, atrocities that war-time-enemies might have committed are explained as being the result of Satanic influence; therefore, if a person is evidently born-again, the reason that they are forgiven is explained using these spiritual idioms. On the surface, it seems that the church is a primary location in which true reconciliation occurs, despite there being little explicit effort and no explicit ritual or dialogue to initiate it.

The proceedings of the TRC, by contrast, consider a successful reconciliation to involve a ritual by which a perpetrator 'holds the foot' of whomever he or she is apologising to. This is a practice that all Liberians are familiar with as a form of traditional reconciliation. However, the ritual itself is practically forced upon people; in some cases it was clearly an uncomfortable interaction. In such situations, even if a victim did forgive the perpetrator, it was not necessarily a result of the TRCs proceedings; in many cases, reconciliation had actually occurred before the TRC even approached the parties. They were asked to come to the TRC, instead, to 'tell their story'. While this might be important, it is not an example of TRC-instigated reconciliation between individuals, of which there are few.

A major criticism of TRCs, Liberia's included, is that they are ineffective at promoting reconciliation, and can actually worsen relations between individuals.<sup>1</sup> There are a number of examples of this occurring after a person made public testimonies that brought up another person's name. A particularly high-profile example took place at the Monrovia public hearings, during which the name of musician and Executive Mansion office-holder Sundaygar Dearboy<sup>2</sup> was brought up in connection to a gang rape and murder<sup>3</sup>; his name was brought up again in the Buchanan hearings<sup>4</sup>. Such accusations, however true or untrue they actually were, resulted in evident tension not just between him and his accusers, but also among Liberians who followed the story and debated about his guilt or innocence.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, there are comparatively few examples of the TRC helping anybody to reconcile who had not either already reconciled before the TRC existed, or who did not do so in a way that appeared to many to be totally inauthentic, or which was later admitted to be inauthentic.<sup>6</sup> Of course, the TRC highlights its success stories<sup>7</sup>; it is likely that there are many more than they or others have described. However, it is important to acknowledge that forgiveness and reconciliation between individuals is

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Lundy and McGovern, 'Rethinking', 271; Brahm, 'Uncovering' 19-21.

<sup>2</sup> Dearboy initially denied any involvement during the war, though he later admitted to being recruited by Taylor as a child soldier, but still denied committing any atrocities. VOA, 13 Feb 2008. In November 2008 he agreed to appear in front of the TRC and admitted only to minor crimes. In the final report, he was listed among those recommended for prosecution as Most Notorious Perpetrators. *TRC Final Report*, 332.

<sup>3</sup> The Liberia Times, 8 January 2008, 'As TRC Kicks off Hearings in Monrovia, Sundaygar Dearboy Accused of War Crimes, Rape, Killings'.

<sup>4</sup> TRC Press Release 17 April 2008, 'Sundaygar Dearboy Ordered the Killing of My son: Witness'.

<sup>5</sup> Gberie, 'Truth', 457.

<sup>6</sup> As with the 'false reconciliation' between Prince Johnson and the Doe family, in which a relative claimed that reconciliation rites were imposed on the family, as described in a TRC press release on 22 July 2008, 'Reconciliation with Prince Johnson Bogus... President Doe's Relative'.

<sup>7</sup> Most of these stories are available on the website, many written by TRC commissioners. For example, see: 'TRC Reconciling the nation, one community at a time', 8 April 2008.

achieved in other contexts as well, without needing encouragement or mediation from the TRC or anybody else for that matter.

Fletcher and Weinstein ask, ‘How [can] people learn to live next to each other without killing their neighbours and what factors will contribute to peaceful coexistence?’ Their response is ‘that reconciliation is likely an individual act that represents a choice made based on one’s ability to forgive or forget. It is not an action that the state or the international community can mandate’.<sup>8</sup> As the above examples indicate, Liberian Pentecostal churches can be viewed as venues in which reconciliation between individuals occurs willingly and genuinely. Further, putting certain narratives in spiritual idioms enables people to address such trauma implicitly. This method of reconciliation is possible because of the way Pentecostals perceive the bigger picture of why the war happened, and what was going on in the spirit world to determine physical events. In dealing with the individuals who were instigators of this physical war, the spiritual idioms are effective in helping people understand that whoever might have harmed them was under some type of demonic influence, somehow beyond their control. Now that they are in Christ, there is no reason to hold those past actions against them.

### *7.1.2 National Reconciliation*

A common response from Pentecostals when asked how they changed when they became born again was that they developed a ‘forgiving heart’ or ‘learned to love my enemies’ in a general sense. Such ideals can be clearly beneficial for a society trying to achieve national reconciliation. Among Pentecostals, there were many instances in

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<sup>8</sup> Fletcher and Weinstein, ‘Rethinking’, 637.

which forgiveness and love for everybody was explained to be an outcome of their becoming born-again. Often Pentecostals explained their reasons for mass forgiveness in the same ways as they did when explaining their reasons for personal forgiveness: it was not the individual or group that committed evil themselves, but it was Satan that manipulated those individuals who therefore had a relative lack of control over their wicked actions. Understanding this enabled believers to forgive all the wickedness that occurred during the war. For example, one member of CEPC narrated to me the story of how she became involved with the church; in it, she explained how it had helped her to forgive,

The soldiers, the ones in Doe army, they took my husband's life away. He wasn't doing anything bad, we were just sitting there. They come into our place and they [accused us of] supporting the rebels and that we should be punished. My husband cursed at them and they [became angry] and they just shot him right there... He died and from that day on I swore I hated those boys, I hated that government army, and so I supported Charles Taylor up to when he got to be president. I voted for him because I was still vexed... But then I joined CEPC and Reverend Dagadu he said that people who did bad things like that, who killed, that they are under the power of the dark world. So I cannot [continue to] hate those boys who did that, because it wasn't them who did it.

Others, in addition to perceiving individuals or groups who harmed them as under the control of the devil, explained that there was simply no point in holding grudges against them. In addition to forgiving what they had done, spiritual action needed to be taken to help them repent and transform. Dealt with in these terms, a traumatic situation can be understood and through deliverance, prayer and evangelism, all past enemies can be symbolically confronted and the situation can be forgiven and perceived to have been seriously addressed. This can be hugely therapeutic for victims of trauma. For example, Sister Georgia of CEPC/CHRISEM lost her entire

left leg as a result of a rocket attack by anonymous ‘rebels’ in the early stages of the war, and explained in spiritual idioms why it was important to forgive them:

Of course I forgive them. It was not they who did it, it was the devil working through them. I pray for these people, I don’t know who they are specifically but I know that through my prayers, God will deliver them from their sins, so I must forgive them... If I knew them [personally] I would go to them and say, ‘I love you and I forgive you, you must take your sins to God and He will forgive you too. I would not take vengeance, never, that is wicked too; that is not Jesus’ way!

This encouragement for general forgiveness, however one experienced the war and whether or not those who caused harm have confessed or apologised for their actions, is an important factor in promoting national reconciliation. In order for general forgiveness to occur, there needs to be an obvious reason for victims to do so; TRCs incorrectly assume that this reason will be the same for all victims.<sup>9</sup> In Liberia, the TRC is not clear about whether or not its primary intention is to facilitate individual reconciliation, national reconciliation or something else. Accomplishing any type of reconciliation is further complicated by the reality that many Liberians cannot articulate why the war was fought and who were the victims and perpetrators were. Most often the time of war is explained simply as ‘time of wickedness’ in which ‘everyone suffered and everyone contributed’. When the TRC makes vague calls for general forgiveness; the specific reasons for these calls are unclear for many Liberians.

Even if the TRC did have clearer ambitions, it is likely that because the mandate and actions of the Liberian TRC are actively de-spiritualised and thus heavily decontextualised from the all-too-important spirit world, it would still be viewed with limited legitimacy. By comparison, Pentecostal churches are successful in their calls

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<sup>9</sup> Hamber and Wilson, ‘Symbolic’, 35-6.

for general reconciliation and forgiveness: the reasons are situated within a context that explains the past as a time of wickedness in more detail: it was a time in which the country and its people were effectively taken over by Satan. Therefore, the proper approach for dealing with this time of wickedness is first, by forgiving everyone, and then acting within the spiritual realm to address the spiritual imbalance: prayer, fasting and evangelism. Regardless of the specific spiritual idioms that people refer to in order to forgive others, these idioms are evidently enabling people to truly forgive in a way the TRC does not.

### *7.1.3 Reintegration of perpetrators*

While it is clearly important for victims to deal with the traumas they experienced during the war, any moves towards peacebuilding must also take into account the individuals that were, at one point or another, perpetrators. These individuals require a venue in which they can confess, ask for forgiveness, and be reintegrated into their communities. The example of Blahyi in the previous chapter makes clear the value that the church has in providing a venue to confess, repent, and ask for forgiveness for any past action, even mass murder, rape and cannibalism. Of course, Blahyi is a particular case, since he had such a prominent role in the war and, since, in public life. Still, Blahyi's reintegration after his personal transformation is representative of many stories among Pentecostals, particularly young men. Dozens of individuals in the churches under consideration were openly ex-combatants and ex-criminals who had found their opportunity to be reintegrated into society through the church.

Tucker and AB, two security guards for Winners' Chapel, fought for the NPFL, first recruited in 1992 when they were fourteen. After the war, they became

prominent members of Winners' Chapel. There are a number of reasons that Pentecostalism helped these ex-perpetrators, and many others, to be reintegrated. First, they were truly forgiven and accepted by fellow churchgoers and, eventually, other members of the community, because their confession and repentance was perceived to be totally legitimate, being spiritually-based. As AB told me,

People knew that I was a fighter; that I killed; that I took drugs. But they said that with Christ, I could be changed. So they accepted me, and they helped me to change... I stood up and I said, I'm sorry for what I did to you people and this country, and I know the devil had me under his power then but I am a changed man, and you won't see me doing these bad things again... and they forgave me right there. They forgave me before I even said sorry, but they really accepted me like nothing had happened; I thank God for that.

Similarly, Tucker explained,

I wasn't a General or anything [big], but people knew me. They knew I was working close with Charles Taylor for the SSS, and that those boys got up to trouble... But then when I stopped that and I came to Winners', nobody told me to get lost, even though I was still out [sleeping with many women], and still sometimes smoking drugs... But they stayed with me and said that if I kept praying to Jesus, then he would help me to leave this behaviour behind... I do it, I still battle the devil but I pray to Jesus, stay in my room, and he always comes through, I thank God for Oyedepo for this message that Jesus can save anybody, and help me to change, and I thank God for Winners' Chapel for accepting me and helping me to discover my true self.

Second, the churches provided these individuals with spiritual idioms to help them understand the sins they committed in the past, and through that, a way to forgive themselves. AB explained,

Some of the things I did, before, I can't even think about them, they were too bad. I won't even tell you some of the things I did. But now I know that it was not me. I am AB, I am good, back then I was a fighter and they had some control over me. The devil, he was in my head and when the devil is in my head, and there is nobody helping me to get him out, what happens? Wickedness. So, I did those things, but when I found Christ, I saw the light and I knew, I can change my ways because with the Holy Spirit, the devil will go away and stop messing with my life. I repented for what I did and God told me, 'AB, I forgive you', and that was it... Yeah I still feel bad for what I did but all I do is pray, and God can make me to know that now that I am a true believer, I am a different person.

Similarly, Tucker explained,

They [evangelists who prayed over him when he was working for SSS] told me that the devil was controlling my life but that it didn't have to be like that, so when I took Jesus, the devil went, and things got better... When I was 14, I was recruited and from then until I got saved, all I knew was guns, all I thought about was taking drugs and [holding onto] my AK-47... If I didn't have AK-47 in my hands I felt scared, like I could get killed, wherever I was. But then I took Jesus and I realised that I was safe without my AK, because Jesus will save me... I was able to see that God had forgiven what I did in the past and that if I did not start to forgive myself, then that would keep me doing bad... The devil wants you to feel guilty, because when you feel guilty you feel bad and then you leave the Lord.

The TRC, by contrast, has few clear examples of helping ex-combatants be reintegrated into society based purely on their TRC testimony; those that were reintegrated had already been so years before. Also in the case of Blahyi, while he used the TRC as a public venue to ask for national forgiveness, it was neither the reason for his ability to re-integrate into society when the war was over, nor the reason he was granted total forgiveness by most of the population. He achieved this far earlier than the TRC, and mainly as a result of his evangelistic activities.

He further expressed how, while Winners' helped him to reform his life and change his behaviour, the TRC could not have helped him, nor did he have faith that it could help others in the same way that Winners' did:

The TRC is not necessary for me, [it is] not necessary for anybody in the war. Actually, it is a bad thing. There is a Kpelle<sup>10</sup> proverb, you have a sore that is healing over, but you take a stick to make it to bleed again, and then you find a doctor to cure it. This is the mark of a stupid man because it is not necessary to take that stick and open the wound again in the first place... Most people who are going to the TRC, some say the truth, but many are lying. For example, Charles Julu, he killed a lot of people, some say he killed xyz, that person has children, we blame people and it keeps this thing alive and you keep discussing it, and you feel pain... Perpetrators should be forgiven, even Blahyi, he is now a man of God, he has a family, he is preaching the word of God. Taking him to court is not necessary.

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<sup>10</sup> Liberia's largest ethnic group.

Even if the TRC did effectively mediate reintegration of those who confessed and apologised, there were few who actually did so. Most major players actively refused to make an apology, claiming that they were not responsible for whatever had been done<sup>11</sup>; others excused their actions as a ‘consequence of war’<sup>12</sup> or just expressed vague remorse.<sup>13</sup> Few perpetrators used the TRC process to ask for forgiveness and even when they did, many people perceived these apologies and requests for forgiveness to be inauthentic and done only to avoid prosecution in the future. Truly heartfelt apologies were rare in the TRC proceedings; if they were authentic, few people considered them to be so.

This was the case even when one testimony-giver claimed to be born-again and under the influence of demons during the war. For example, Mustapha Allen Nicholas, previously known as Arab Devil, admitted to his involvement in a number of massacres that took place during the war. He testified: ‘I am begging all of you to please forgive me. What I did was done under the influence of demons. Please forgive us, especially me, I am asking for forgiveness’.<sup>14</sup> others made similar confessions.

When asked about such confessions, one woman in CEPC said,

Some people go up there and testify that it was demons because he doesn’t want to get in trouble. I say the man still has demons! I don’t know what they do but if

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<sup>11</sup> For example, Charles Julu refused to apologise to anybody, despite numerous witnesses testifying to atrocities against them. TRC Press Release 12 June 2008, ‘Charles Julu Executed Prominent Nimbaians in 1985 Witness Tells TRC Hearings...Demands Apology from Julu’.

<sup>12</sup> For example, in one press release: ‘National Security Advisor H. Boima Fahnbullah told commissioners of Liberia’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) he owes no apology for his role in Liberia’s conflict past. 7 August 2008 TRC Press Release.

<sup>13</sup> For example, in one press release: ‘The leader of the defunct ULIMOD-K faction, Alhaji G. V. Kromah Monday wept profusely as he expressed penitence for his role in the Liberian conflict. “Our objective in ULIMOD was not to target anybody. But it is very possible that some people could have died in crossfire. We are really sorry that this whole thing happened,” August 2008 TRC Press Release.

<sup>14</sup> Day five of TRC Public Hearings, Monrovia, transcript available at [www.trcofliberia.org](http://www.trcofliberia.org).

they are truly born again, and they make this testimony in front of God, then ok, but too many people they just go say these things to try to avoid punishment.

The problem, then, was not the actual substance of the testimony given but rather, that the testimony was given in a non-church context. In other words, it was given for the sake of reconciliation, false or otherwise. Within the Pentecostal setting, by contrast, a testimony will be given for the sake of God. Therefore, these testimonies are perceived to be far more legitimate and therefore, far more likely to encourage re-integration of someone who was once bad.

Evident in the statements made by AB and Tucker, testimony in a public venue like the TRC could cause perpetrators to fear public embarrassment or worse, future prosecution, thus discouraging them from doing so. When testifying within the church, however, the perpetrator can be confident that he or she will be accepted back into the community. Further, because the testimony is given in spiritual idioms, it has a much deeper relevance to the perpetrator and those listening. All of these factors enabled perpetrators to feel better and be truly reintegrated, but it also enabled members of Pentecostal churches to really believe that they were giving a ‘true testimony, in church’ over those who testified only in a secular setting, because, as one CEPC leader told me, ‘It is from the heart, and you know it is not under false pretences, so that they don’t get jail or something. They do it because they know Christ is looking at them, so it is real’.

A major strand of criticism of TRCs is based on their being a weak substitute for prosecution, particularly in contexts where amnesty is granted on the basis of one’s (apparently) truthful confession and vocal repentance. While one cannot deny the value of the TRC process if it actually facilitates true confessions, repentance and

forgiveness, the reality is that most in most TRCs, including Liberia's, there are numerous testimonies in which perpetrators lie, make excuses, offer non-genuine apologies, and half-heartedly participate in rituals reconciliation. Even if truly genuine and truthful, some have noted that there is a natural shifting of blame to one's past enemies, among both victims and perpetrators.<sup>15</sup> This is problematic not just as it relates to the victim and perpetrator that are the subjects of a particular incident, but also for the population as a whole who observe these proceedings and consider them to be illegitimate and a waste of time, as many in Liberia have.

One of the assumptions of the TRC is that reintegration will successfully occur only if the perpetrator makes a public and legitimate apology to the community or individual whom he or she has hurt. If this is one standard by which the Liberian TRC can be measured, then clearly it has failed. The churches, however, have been active venues for reintegration of perpetrators, both by actively accepting them into the church community also, by accepting a perpetrator's claim to have been transformed by becoming born-again. The value of the churches in this respect has been noted by other observers both within Liberia<sup>16</sup> and elsewhere.<sup>17</sup>

#### *7.1.4 Catharsis of story-telling*

Pentecostal services undoubtedly give people the time, space and encouragement to speak about any variety of issues, specifically through the practice of giving testimonies. Often, these testimonies are emotional, passionate, and those who give

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<sup>15</sup> Tim Kelsall, 'Truth, Lies, Ritual: Preliminary Reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 27: 2, 2005, 372-3.

<sup>16</sup> Gerrie ter Haar and James Busuttil, (eds.), *Bridge or Barrier: Religion, Violence and Visions for Peace*, Leiden: Brill, 2005, 24; See also Ellis, 'Young soldiers'.

<sup>17</sup> See especially Kevin Ward, 'The Armies of the Lord: Christianity, Rebels and the State in Northern Uganda, 1986-1999', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 31:2, 2001, 206-7.

them are obviously willing to tell their story. He or she stands up, sometimes begins with a song, shouts into the microphone and encourages responses from the congregation. There is never any lack of people willing to speak; sometimes a person will speak for so long that they need to be encouraged to take their seat, always done in a cordial and friendly manner, sometimes humorous: ‘The woman can talk-o!’.

Other times, the person gives a quick, ‘I thank God for my life’. The response by the audience is clearly encouraging and respectful – they are engaged, responsive and demonstrably supporting of the testimony-giver, whatever he or she is saying.

Sometimes it ends with a round of applause, cheers, or a song. The relief and joy that Pentecostal member gets from giving their testimonies is evident. After speaking, those who have given testimony will return to their seats smiling, at times dancing down the aisle and clapping their hands.

Though the point of these testimonies is to tell the audience ‘what God has done for me’, they are often also focused on, ‘What my life was before God saved me’; therefore, a narrative of past pain and suffering is often an integral part. Sometimes, people testify that ‘I’ve never told anyone before, but I have to give God the glory’, and then go into a very personal and serious story about their past sins, for which they have repented and been forgiven by God. Generally, testimonies did not deal with stories of war – perhaps this would have been different had fieldwork been conducted during the war or closer to its end in 2003 – but today, people are focused on the problems and events that are effecting their lives in the present. Looking at these, though, and the brutal honesty that some people have in confessing serious sins, but repenting and asking for forgiveness, one can see the major value that the church has

for providing an atmosphere of legitimate and cathartic testimony. It also provides a venue in which people have an opportunity to talk about whatever they want.

A major objective of TRCs is to ‘provide a space’ to victims in which they can tell their story to an audience that, by virtue of their listening, legitimises and respects their experience. It is argued that telling their story in public can be therapeutic to victims because it gives them a venue in which their traumas can be ‘officially acknowledged’.<sup>18</sup> It is not only the truth-telling that is important in promoting social healing, but victims can also experience a beneficial ‘catharsis of story-telling’: it is simply the *act of* telling a story that can make people feel better, whatever that story is or means to them.<sup>19</sup>

TRCs provide a venue in which a person is thought to be able to ‘work through’ the facts about what happened to them, in order to better understand or deal with them.<sup>20</sup> This is often explained to be a form of ‘healing through storytelling’, so that a victim can ‘reshape traumatic events to fit into the matrix of their lives’.<sup>21</sup> The ritual space provided by, or recommended by a truth commission for the purpose of speaking about the past is most effective if it is flexible so that each individual or group can reflect upon it as they need.<sup>22</sup>

Undoubtedly, the space provided within a Pentecostal church fits this description and is evidently a location of personal and community healing. The act of storytelling in the church is explicitly explained to believers as ‘a way to glorify

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<sup>18</sup> Brahm, ‘Uncovering’, 20.

<sup>19</sup> Kelsall, ‘Truth’, 363.

<sup>20</sup> Hamber and Wilson, ‘Symbolic’, 68-9.

<sup>21</sup> Lyn Graybill, ‘To punish or pardon: A comparison of the international criminal tribunal for Rwanda and the South African truth and reconciliation commission’, *Human Rights Review*, 3:4, 2001, 3-4.

<sup>22</sup> Hamber and Wilson, ‘Symbolic’, 48-50.

God'. While in the TRC, people stand up, tell their story and are told that 'this will help you to move on', in church, it is explained to them *why* this will help them move on, in spiritual idioms – because God loves when you tell your story about what he has done for you. A testimony allows a person to speak about the war in idioms, thereby allowing them to deal with the past in a less painful, traumatic and explicit way. The benefits of 'talking about it', are still felt – being given a space in which to say whatever a person wants, to be respected and listened to, and to be confident that there will be a positive consequence, in some form, at the end. Pastor Benda explained the power of testimony most clearly,

When you testify, you are telling God that the past is over and the future will be great thanks to Him. You are telling God that whatever happened before it cannot bother you any longer, because when you have the Holy Ghost, all pain is washed away. When you give your testimony the devil runs away!

In contrast to Pentecostals willingly giving their testimonies to their fellow churchgoers, TRCs have less evident cathartic benefit. This is especially apparent when the 'ritual' is performed in such a formal and guided manner as during public testimonies or when testimony-givers are pressured to tell their stories. In some situations, public truth-telling can be not only uncomfortable, but possibly inappropriate and harmful. Kelsall has shown that in Sierra Leone, public truth-telling without a legitimate ritual foundation is highly unlikely to occur without external pressure and, when it does, can lead to public embarrassment of those who decide to participate, lies among those who were pressured to participate, or boycotting of the proceedings.

However, some critics have highlighted that bringing up the past again, encouraging or even insisting that people tell stories that might still be painful to

them, might cause them further trauma.<sup>23</sup> Brahm has suggested that this might ‘trigger post traumatic stress among victims’.<sup>24</sup> More practically, those giving testimonies might have a fear of reprisals from those loyal to those whom they have testified against, or might fear being outcast by their community for revealing whatever happened to them. Such fears would strongly deter key witnesses from testifying, thereby making the cathartic benefit of storytelling only available for the brave few. A further limitation is that for many victims who tell their stories, justice is never actually carried out, nor are they given the reparations that they were expecting. In the longer term, then, this might cause more harm than good for the victims: ‘For victims, too little has been done and for perpetrators, and perhaps bystanders, too much. In such a situation, neither may be prepared to back down’.<sup>25</sup>

The criticism that testimonies have limited cathartic value for victims has been made about the proceedings of the Liberian TRC, in which many victims were demonstrably upset by giving their testimonies and admitted that, ‘I am only speaking here because I want you to help me, but really I just want to forget this’. Others even publicly admitted to being re-traumatised by speaking, and have said they wished they hadn’t spoken. Some of their regret was due to the way they were treated during the process, as Gberie has highlighted in his observations of the Monrovia public hearings.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, ‘Symbolic’, 50.

<sup>24</sup> Brahm, ‘Uncovering’, 23.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Worse, onlookers, including some Commissioners, would giggle when victims narrated unusual forms of atrocities, including particularly creative forms of rape’. Gberie also remarks that ‘I am not alone in finding this remarkable. Many foreign observers, including UN human rights officials, have complained about this attitude. One of them, Deputy Head of UNMIL, told me that Liberians are simply “too traumatized”, and that, in any case, with the total absence of the rule of law for so long, they simply have no conception of their civic responsibility, not to mention crime and punishment’. Gberie, ‘Truth’, 459.

Observers of TRCs have also highlighted how the narratives given by witnesses, victims and perpetrators tend to be clinical, detached, and somewhat emotionless. Because of this, one must question the extent to which the individuals speaking, and those to whom they are speaking, are effectively alleviating their trauma or if they are simply going through the motions for different reasons. In the Liberian TRC proceedings, many of the victims admitted to speaking because they thought it would somehow result in their being given reparations; nearly every testimony ended with a request for help of some sort. Many testimonies also began with thanks to the TRC for, ‘listening to me’ where the government had not paid attention; what they meant, it would be later confirmed in each testimony, was that they were asking for assistance and they were thankful not because their traumatic experience was alleviated in any meaningful way but rather that finally, someone was taking their need for financial assistance seriously. If they achieved some sort of trauma healing as a result of telling their story to the TRC, it was not at all apparent, nor did anybody claim to have felt better by telling their story.

Shaw has demonstrated how the Sierra Leonean TRC was profoundly misunderstood by many people who took part in it:

Those who testified before the Commission verbalized their memories of horrific violence before a local, national and international audience. But they testified in their own way, holding back from a full *blow main* [telling all] expression of their experience, and integrating their testimony into prevailing understandings of healing as forgetting. Thus from the very beginning their truth telling diverged from that of a simple duplication of TRC ideals: transformed by its context, truth-telling became a new technique of forgetting.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Rosalind Shaw, ‘Memory frictions: Localizing the truth and reconciliation commission in Sierra Leone’, *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 1, 2007, 207.

Such observations highlight the major limitations that TRCs have, even if people claim to support it, participate in it and claim that they have been helped by it. How exactly the TRC helped them, in such situations, might be totally different from how the TRC intended to help them. The extent to which a TRC can help the psychological welfare of an entire country of traumatized people is thus even more complicated. There are inherent problems with universalizing notions of transitional justice, which mean different things in different places, and must be appreciated with respect to their specific contexts.<sup>28</sup>

Those who give their testimonies within Pentecostal churches, however, are doing so for entirely different reasons: to glorify God. The TRC, despite claiming to ‘make a free space’ for people to tell their stories, is perceived to be, and actually is, part of a rigid process for a specific purpose. The outcome is perceived by participants to be, but is very rarely, material; failure to deliver this outcome renders the entire process illegitimate. Within the church, however, whatever blessings might be received (or not) is part of God’s plan; whatever the outcome of testimony is, it will never be questioned as illegitimate.

#### *7.1.5 Forward-looking*

We have seen that Pentecostal churches are similar in their perpetual preaching on ‘forward ever, backward never’ and the general message that one needs to focus on the positive aspects that will come in the future, and not dwell on the negative things that have happened in the past. Church members often explain this as a major reason

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<sup>28</sup> ‘[I]nterventions may be both repressively top-down and locally integrated in creative ways... on the ground... transitional justice is practically engaged in a specific place and time’. Ibid, 187.

for their belonging to such churches. For example, one SUPC member told the women's group that,

I want to thank God for SUPC because we talk about the future! We know that God will be there for us tomorrow and that if we dwell on the past then the devil will be there to keep us down. I can't think about the past, what good are bad feelings to bring up again? So I thank God for my church, because it keeps me going forward, having hope that things will get better, and thank God, they get better all the time!

A visitor to Winners' Chapel told me that,

My other church [UMC], I don't like it because they are always speaking on how we need to remember what happened to avoid it in the future, but here at Winners', they never say anything about the past, they know that the devil lurks in the past and that is where he can make you fall, so I love that Winners' will always teach me to move forward; it enabled me to do so, now I feel encouraged but in the other place I just left and I felt bad, like God was mad at me and there was nothing I could do. Winners' has the truth, God wants to help me succeed!

TRCs are often supported over formal retributive justice mechanisms because they are considered to be more forward-looking, as Desmond Tutu explained of the South African TRC: '[retributive justice] has a number of shortcomings... Trials are backward looking rather than promoting social renewal'.<sup>29</sup>

However, in Liberia, many people considered the truth commissions to be doing exactly what Tutu was trying to avoid – rehashing the past through the narrating of these atrocities. Such reminders, so explicitly released into the public domain, could be detrimental to a fragile society. The Liberian TRC perpetually pointed out to victims and perpetrators giving testimony, and in encouraging others to come forward, that a major reason telling their stories was to enable Liberia to 'move forward', 'be healed', 'resolve the past', and a variety of other relatively vague notions that implied they were forward-looking. In reality, though, most people

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<sup>29</sup> Tutu 1999, cited in Brahm, 'Uncovering', 16.

perceived the TRC to be ‘opening old wounds’; they were moving forward whether the TRC existed or not and by talking about the past again did not contribute to moving forward. So, critics point out, if it is the past itself that causes pain, what good is it to continue reflecting on it?<sup>30</sup> The TRC is clearly trying to address the past in a more sensitive manner than retributive justice mechanisms do, but that still requires them to talk about it. Given this major limitation, aside from ignoring the issue altogether, what is the alternative?

## **7.2 *The Power of Pentecostalism***

To this point we have been dealing with the practical limitations of the TRC, and the practical successes of Pentecostal initiatives for achieving the same goals. With respect to each major issue, the data were also considered with respect to the theoretical side of the TRC debate. We have seen how the Pentecostal ‘methods’, in the Liberian case, can and have overcome many of apparent limitations of the TRC. The seeming conclusion from this discussion is that Pentecostals are more successful at achieving the goals of reconciliation and peacebuilding than the TRC, at least in Liberia.

The major point being made here is that Pentecostal methods have a particular relevance because they have spiritual legitimacy – they are based upon the worldview that peace is a result of spiritual order. Pentecostal initiatives, therefore, are understood and acted upon in ways that have far deeper relevance than any secular initiative ever could. Considering these major advantages, where secular initiatives

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<sup>30</sup> See especially Jack Snyder and Leslie Vinjamuri, ‘Trials and Errors: Principle and Pragmatism in Strategies of International Justice’, *International Security*, 28: 3, 2003/04, 5-44.

are inherently limited, and their evident successes in the Liberian situation, one might be inclined to agree with Ellis' assessment that 'healing... lies in the spiritual field at least as much as in the political one, and at the local level rather than the national one', and be particularly encouraged by the spiritual discourses of Pentecostalism.

There have been major increases in the funding and activities devoted to Western ideas of law and justice – in the form of international courts, human rights NGOs, hybrid courts, propping up/training of domestic legal teams, among others. As Ignatieff put it, 'human rights and rights-based action have become one of the prime manifestations of globalization'.<sup>31</sup> Lundy and McGovern have articulated this as the 'judicialisation of international relations'.<sup>32</sup> The fact that so many of these initiatives are donor-driven is highlighted by critics who argue that the imposition of these Western ideals in whatever form -- international courts and even the support for domestic (usually Western-based or at least Western inspired) law is that, despite its relevance in the global sphere, it is so disconnected from the local context that it is doubtful to what extent such efforts could help the country in which it is being practised. International courts are also often highlighted as being ignored by the population for which these courts are trying to win 'justice'.<sup>33</sup> Some go so far to say that these impositions are nothing more than Western experiments in international law.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> M. Ignatieff, *Whose Universal Values? The Crisis in Human Rights*. Amsterdam: Praemium Erasmianum Foundation, 2009.

<sup>32</sup> Lundy and McGovern, 'Rethinking', 275-6.

<sup>33</sup> This has been observed with respect to Rwanda and Sierra Leone. Gready, 'Reconceptualizing', 13-14.

<sup>34</sup> 'The ICTR is an example of international justice by and for the international community... an act of 'symbolic politics'... reaffirmation of the international community's own morality'... undermined by mismanagement, inefficiency, corruption, political tensions and is lethargic pace... For the Rwandan population, the Court is largely unknown and irrelevant', Ibid, 11.

Because such courts are, whatever the specific situation, ultimately imposed from the outside, they come with their own ideas of what justice is in that context, how best to achieve it, and what success might look like.<sup>35</sup> Teitel has explained how the very notion of transitional justice has inherently universalistic tendencies.<sup>36</sup> While such impositions generally have the country's best interest in mind, such assumptions about what is best for a country, based on these universals, has been evidently unsuccessful at building peace or, in some cases, contributed to further conflict or tension. In Africa, impositions of Western ideas of justice can be particularly ineffective. As Wiredu has written, 'Moral rightness or wrongness... is understood in terms of human interests... a moral rule is articulated on the basis of its ability to meet human needs in the communal setting'.<sup>37</sup> Despite perceptions of justice being culturally specific, a primary objective of Western governments, and increasingly, NGOs and the UN, is to enforce laws and ideas surrounding justice, generally under the aegis of 'human rights'. While respect for human rights may be important from a Western perspective, one cannot take for granted their meaning and relevance elsewhere: "humanitarians moved by the cruelty of war... however sincere or commendable their cause, seek to impose on Africans a particular view of what is right and wrong".<sup>38</sup>

NGOs, the UN, Western governments and foreign businesses are involved in nearly every sector of the reconstruction of Liberia. International donors have

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<sup>35</sup> See especially B. Oomen, 'Donor Driven Justice and its Discontents: The Case of Rwanda', *Development and Change*, 36, 2006, 890. Also, Gready writes, 'Cultural interpretations of law, justice, conflict, democracy, agency/responsibility, trauma and reconciliation are often overlooked by the law and transitional justice debates', Gready, 'Reconceptualizing', 6-7.

<sup>36</sup> Teitel, 'Genealogy', 83-4.

<sup>37</sup> Wiredu cited in Ellis and ter Haar, *World*, 142.

<sup>38</sup> Ellis and ter Haar, *Worlds*, 148.

implemented a prefabricated ‘justice package’ that has also been implemented in Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>39</sup> All of these interventions tell Liberians what ought to happen, and how this is best achieved.<sup>40</sup> Usually this involves a stress on human rights.<sup>41</sup> Sometimes their influence is subtle, being primarily executed by local organisations or individuals. Other times it is done under the guise of ‘community based’ initiatives, but the external influence is nearly always there in some capacity. Most of these, as elsewhere in the world, are somehow concerned with promoting human rights and, therefore, are somehow telling Liberians how to act, think and change in order to help their country.

Many Liberians listen, but what they hear is not necessarily what was intended or, whatever they are told might not make any sense. Englund points out that the relentless promotion of human rights in Africa by the West is far more complicated than assumed, and that a more fundamental understanding of the people being dealt with is critical: ‘The need to resist the dead hand of human rights can be translated into a call for understanding complexity. Those who promote more ‘civic education’ as a response to alternative approaches to politics may themselves have a lesson to learn.’<sup>42</sup>

A further complication is that ‘freedom of culture’ is also a human right; in some cases a decision must be made as to which right is more important. When certain

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<sup>39</sup> A. Henkin, (ed.), ‘Honoring Human Rights Under International Mandates: Lessons from Bosnia, Kosovo and East Timor. Recommendations to the United Nations’. *Justice and Society Program*. Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute, 2003, 5.

<sup>40</sup> Abramowitz writes: ‘[C]ollectively targeted interventions [TRC, public medias, human rights trainings, and gender-based violence trainings,] have attempted to disseminate post-conflict ideals of collective morality, state participation, and social organization... that targets moral and behavioural transformation... They impart to their audiences idealized visions of what citizenship means, how bureaucracy works, and how local governance ought to happen’. Abramowitz, *Psychosocial*, 294-5.

<sup>41</sup> See especially Hayner, ‘Fifteen’, 609.

<sup>42</sup> Harri Englund, The dead hand of human rights: contrasting Christianities in post-transition Malawi’, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 38, 601.

traditional justice mechanisms do not mesh with Western ideas about human rights, for example with trial by ordeal, or female genital cutting in Sande initiations, interventions occur to point out that these traditions are harmful: ‘Do not end your traditions, but just those that cause harm to others’. Such a message, when demanded without an explanation as to why, can be both confusing and illogical to those who hear it. In some cases, because of this profound misunderstanding between local and international actors, these interventions may be doing more harm than good.<sup>43</sup>

There is also a danger in international organisations intervening because of the unrealistically high expectations that are often placed upon them, especially in a place like Liberia where international organisations play a critical role in helping the country’s recovery. It is not surprising that people look to them for hope; but indeed, they make a number of promises that they cannot achieve. Abramowitz demonstrates this well with respect to Liberia where it is common for people to expect the international community to bring about more development than is actually possible. The hopes that Liberians have are not strictly focused upon material progress, either; even awareness campaigns and empowerment workshops promise people that society has miraculously changed so that its people are ‘better’. This becomes apparent in discussions surrounding human rights, for example, ‘Liberia is a new country and now the government has to respect your human rights’. When a woman, then, goes to court to complain that somebody raped her, but is ignored, she can be disillusioned by the entire international system. Promises are not taken lightly by the people, yet so many are made and then broken.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Archibald and Richards, ‘Conversion’, 363.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Perhaps the psycho-socialization of the Liberian populace will create the conditions for democratic reform throughout the nation; or perhaps it will create the conditions for a latent rage and

But what is the alternative, many commentators ask? It is difficult to debate that human rights violations should be wholly ignored, or that groups who educate others about what human rights are should be stopped, but Archibald and Richards have proposed another reason: such ideals can develop naturally. They found in Sierra Leone that respect for human rights were not the result of such ideals being taught or enforced from outside, but were the result of local circumstances. Such an observation is critical in understanding that justice, peace and forgiveness are not only a result of initiatives that promote those ideals for their own sake; sometimes, they are the secondary or unintended consequence of quite unrelated factors:

The evidence indicates a new [global] enthusiasm for rights, comparable in some respects to pursuit of justice through conversion to world religions. But this has to be understood, we argue, not as the embrace of any pre-existing global doctrine of rights, but more as an aspect of local social renewal, constrained and shaped by wartime experience. In other words, rights have to be understood, in contextual terms, as an aspect of the reconfiguration of the social.<sup>45</sup>

The increase in ‘culturally relevant’ initiatives that are imposed and/or funded by Western organizations is evidence of an attempt to understand, or at least acknowledge that there exist, major differences in the way different people think and act. Such acknowledgements, however, do little to analyse or deeply understand these differences. For example, USIP writes that, ‘Knowledge of local cultures and cultural sensitivity are essential especially for outsiders involved in the design and/or implementation of intervention strategies.’<sup>46</sup> What exactly ‘cultural sensitivity’ means is not made clear. Further, I argue that such a statement demonstrates the major problem with such ‘culturally sensitive’ interventions – ‘the design and/or

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social division which might undermine the current project of reconstructing the state. Social engineering makes many promises, but is bound to no outcomes.’ Abramowitz, *Psychosocial*, 295.

<sup>45</sup> Archibald and Richards, ‘Conversion’, 340.

<sup>46</sup> Barsalou, ‘Trauma’, 8.

implementation of intervention strategies'. The (external) design of intervention fails to acknowledge that it might be *that very intervention* by the West that *is* the problem. The very act of intervention implies that in order for peacebuilding to result, it must be the explicit intention of another entity that knows the best way to accomplish this.

Considering all these limitations of external interventions by Western organisations that try to enforce their own ideas and morals onto entire populations, one can see why Pentecostal churches, totally untouched by these secular organisations, might be considered to have (the potential for) a particularly important role in Liberians' lives. Pentecostal churches are unique institutions because they are not formally involved with secular entities, yet concerned with the same types of this-worldly problems, but deal with these issues in their own culturally-relevant ways.

The churches take pride in their African-ness and, especially in SUPC and CEPC, their Liberian-ness. There is no inherent contradiction between a proud Liberian and a good Christian; indeed, they actively promote Liberian identity and this is critical for a religious movement to remain popular.

The keys to legitimacy and relevance, in the Liberian imagination, are within the spiritual idioms that are being used to address the issues at hand. Pentecostalism most effectively articulates this spiritual worldview. Grievances, whatever they are, are being addressed using spiritual idioms – the Holy Spirit makes the problems go away or, if it doesn't, it gives people a venue in which to act in order to at least address the issue. Only (spiritually legitimate) religion has the ability to do this; in Liberia, it is Pentecostalism that does it best.

### 7.3 Religion and peacebuilding

The potential for religion to be useful for peace and reconciliation, as detailed in the literature review, is dependent on many circumstances and is dependent on what one considers ‘religion’ to be or do in the first place. In most analyses, religion is considered in terms of the tangible things it can do – its institutional capacities, the teachings that its members take away, its respected leadership that speaks out and how it deals with the political and social world around them.<sup>47</sup> Often cited as critical in this approach is for religion, as Appleby stresses, to ‘collaborate effectively with government, non-government and other religious actors’ and

[d]emonstrate empathy for victims on all sides, a profound commitment to the non-violent management of differences, political insight, extraordinary quantities of “grace” – forbearance, patience, dedication, and the sacrifice of ego. In addition agents of reconciliation must be able to speak a second-order language that transcends religious and ethnic boundaries and fosters collaboration with secular and government agencies and representatives.<sup>48</sup>

There is strong evidence that religion can have a unique ability to transform or legitimise issues affecting people, communities and even nations; however, this role is not limited to explicit social or political action. Nor is this limited to the explicit messages of morality and demands for proper behaviour that religious groups and leaders preach to their congregations. Considering religion in this way is important, and it is critical to acknowledge that each of these dimensions have their own theoretical and practical limitations.<sup>49</sup> This thesis is focusing on an entirely different

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<sup>47</sup> For example Appleby provides a comprehensive look at the role of religion in conflict transformation: conflict management, conflict resolution and structural reform, all of which can be implemented in crisis mode, saturation mode and intervention mode. RS Appleby, *The ambivalence of the sacred*, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000, 9.

<sup>48</sup> Further, he gauges a religious group’s ability to have a role in conflict resolution on the group’s ‘historical record and reputation, size, resources, ethnic composition and public and political presence’. Ibid, 202.

<sup>49</sup> As Appleby writes, ‘Transforming these spiritual gifts into social and political realities... has proven exceedingly complex whenever and wherever it has been attempted.’ Ibid, 169-70.

dimension in which religion plays a critical role: the implicit. It is *because* Pentecostalism actively refuses to ‘speak a second-order language’ and involve itself in peace, for the sake of peace, that it has its power to bring about peace and reconciliation. This dimension – that which encompasses the unintended consequences – is too often ignored or misunderstood.

Appleby’s measure of the potential for religion to play a role in conflict management is based upon these explicit approaches; indeed, he even argues that “religious peacebuilding” is a misnomer if it leads one to believe that religious actors were able to transform dimensions of modern conflict by functioning independently of government and other secular and religious actors’.<sup>50</sup> Appleby does, however, acknowledge Shreiter’s point that for a religion to be effective in helping build peace, it does not necessarily have to work in the same ways as a secular organization would, that is, to consider reconciliation to be something ‘efficient’, ‘managed’, and having ‘a predetermined end’.<sup>51</sup> Still, both authors are missing an even more important point, which ter Haar clearly articulates: ‘there is no other institution that is able to shape the *worldview* of individuals and groups as effectively as religion does’.<sup>52</sup>.

Considering this different way in which peacebuilding may occur, one might argue that Pentecostal methods as they exist now are successful where secular methods are not, and they should continue without any external influences to help Liberia, perhaps even other post-conflict countries, heal and move forward. They are legitimate in all the ways other interventions are not, whether restorative or retributive, because they

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 212.

<sup>51</sup> Robert J. Shreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order*, New York: Orbis, 1992, 15-26.

<sup>52</sup> My emphasis, ter Haar and Busutil, *Bridge* , 22.

address the issues from another direction entirely. Further they are adaptable so that they can fit into a variety of contexts. The successes presented above are good evidence of religion's implicit ability to build peace. So, is Pentecostalism good for peace?

#### ***7.4 The limitations of Pentecostalism for peacebuilding***

First, it needs to be stressed that religion is not the same at every time in every place. Though religion has a fundamental potential to effect change, it won't necessarily do so and even if it does, such changes will not necessarily be consistent, predictable or even based upon that religion's theology. It should be clear now that Pentecostalism in Liberia is very much the latter type of religion with its innumerable spirit idioms that are focused upon the battle between the Holy Spirit and Satan. Analyses of the role of religion in peacebuilding are often dealing with the former type of religion; so, how might this affect the answer to the question of whether Pentecostalism is a seemingly more effective alternative than secular transitional justice mechanisms at helping Liberia achieve peace and reconciliation?

There are two major problems. First, the foundation upon which the Pentecostal methods for articulating and dealing with problems, as we saw in the previous chapters, are not based upon a strictly *Pentecostal* worldview. Rather, they are primarily based on a culturally specific worldview, articulated in Pentecostal idioms. In other contexts, Pentecostalism cannot be expected to have the same role that it does in Liberia at the time research was conducted. How Pentecostalism is manifest is dependent on the underlying religious worldview, and the physical circumstances of the places it finds itself. Second, the ideas and actions that are based upon this

worldview are totally adaptable, flexible and sometimes contradictory, depending on the situation in which they are utilized as a method of explanation, prediction and control of this-worldly events.

### ***7.5 Conclusion***

We have seen how in Liberia, people are confused about how to deal with the war and the people who acted in it. This is not odd; nobody has answers to Liberia's problems and every issue is complicated. However, the Pentecostal discourse enables people to consolidate their opinions about what the best method is, and therefore makes it legitimate and spiritually clear. However, this argument is valid only if we consider the Pentecostal opinions surrounding the war. When it comes to present-day problems with criminals and immorality, Pentecostals are less likely to forgive and forget, specifically because the situation they are faced with is impractical or undesirable if forgiveness or acceptance is involved. This chapter has revealed on what grounds the superficial ideals of forgiveness, reconciliation, love for all and repentance are based among Pentecostals. It should be clear that forgiveness or non-forgiveness is the variable; practicality is the constant. Indeed, practicality is the only constant that we can identify in the many Pentecostalisms in post-conflict Liberia.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### ***Conclusion***

#### ***8.1 The Debates Revisited***

One of the major debates in the study of Pentecostalism deals with its socio-political role. This thesis has taken a slightly different approach from other scholars of Pentecostalism – a case study that considers the implicit role of the Liberian Pentecostal spiritual worldview with respect to transitional justice – to try to measure more specifically what one role of Pentecostalism might be in Liberia. This approach has identified one socio-political role of Pentecostalism in Liberia: that it unintentionally achieves some of the goals of the TRC, which the TRC is unable to achieve itself. Pentecostalism is, in this particular case, better than the TRC at achieving these goals because of the nature of this type of Pentecostalism: primarily concerned with the spirit world and continually utilising flexible and adaptable spiritual explanations and actions to address this-worldly problems. The benefit, therefore, of using this approach to study Pentecostalism is that it not only provides insights into what Pentecostalism can do, but also provides insights into the limitations of external interventions that don't fully appreciate or understand the worldview of the people they are trying to help. The thesis has, in doing this case study, contributed to a number of debates within the fields of Pentecostal studies, transitional justice, and African cultural studies generally.

First, this thesis has shown that for Liberians a major role of Pentecostalism is to correct spiritual imbalances, that is, eliminate evil forces (from Satan) and replace them with good (from God). There is a constant and unfaltering belief that this battle between good and evil is the ultimate determinant of this-worldly events. Within this

general worldview is much variety, flexibility and adaptability that makes Pentecostalism endlessly practical and relevant, especially given the realities of Liberian life today. The type of Pentecostalism found in Liberia gives its adherents a way to make sense of what is and what has been going on in Liberia; more than that, it gives its adherents endless strategies to actively address the problems they face, providing still more explanations as to why problems endure. The flexibility and adaptability of the Liberian Pentecostal worldview depends strongly on the ‘primal religious imagination’ – those beliefs that Liberians maintain from their traditional religious worldviews. Conversion to Christianity, even to a Christianity like Pentecostalism that actively shuns traditional religious practices, does not imply that people no longer believe that these traditional powers exist. In the Liberian Pentecostal worldview, air, earth and water spirits, witches, curses and ancestral spirits and many more are still incredibly real and incredibly dangerous. Pentecostals, in response, tap into the power of a much stronger and benevolent spirit – the Holy Spirit – in order to fight these dangerous spiritual forces.

Therefore in Liberia, Pentecostalism is not changing the religious landscape by reinterpreting what religion is meant for and how it is used. While it is indeed providing people with new types of spiritual explanations and activities, they are still flexible and adaptable and based upon an enduring fundamental religious worldview: that events occurring in the spirit world are the ultimate determinant of this-worldly events, and that human activities can affect the events that occur in the spirit world. This religious worldview manifests itself in Liberia as religiosity that is pre-eminently practical and not theological. This finding goes against a popular line of argument

which assumes that Pentecostalism is a fundamentally new type of religion, overhauling both traditional and colonial institutions in developing countries.

A second debate considers the extent to which Pentecostalism is providing its adherents with a sense of spiritual security, spiritual order or spiritual clarity. By exploring the ways that Pentecostals both tried to make sense of and also tried to solve this-worldly problems, this thesis showed that the Liberian Pentecostal spiritual worldview is endlessly flexible. The discourse and proposed actions for dealing with problems were never-ending and despite repeated failures at seeing solutions, Pentecostals utilized new explanations and new solutions. The reality in Liberia is that problems endure, progress is slow at best, and life is unpredictable and insecure. Pentecostal discourses are thus practical for trying to deal with these circumstances, and thus provide a useful role for those who otherwise have very few ideas or resources on how else to try to solve their problems. That said, there are a few cases in which Pentecostals perceive themselves to have succeeded or solved some problems; when this occurs they are very vocal about this success through testimony. The reason is always the same: God helped me and the devil was defeated. Therefore, spiritual order is perceived when this-worldly solutions are found. Spiritual disorder is perceived to endure when problems are not solved. This observation challenges claims made by Ellis and ter Haar that perceived spiritual order is a necessary prerequisite for physical order. In Liberia, the opposite is the case: spiritual order is only perceived when physical order comes first. Pentecostalism thus is not contributing to perceptions of spiritual disorder and clarity; instead, it is contributing to the variety of spiritual discourses that can be utilized in order to articulate this enduring physical disorder and confusion.

A third debate deals with the socio-political role of Pentecostalism around the world; few analyses within this debate take fully into account the spiritual worldview that underlies this religious movement, and instead the analyses are based upon what is preached within these churches. A suggested implication from such analyses is that those who convert to Pentecostalism undergo a profound transformation; over time and on a larger scale, entire cultures can be reformed. This argument cannot be applied in the Liberian case. This thesis has provided substantial evidence that, indeed, the Pentecostal ideal is to become the ‘good Christian’ that some argue Pentecostals actually become, but that the reality in Liberia is that most Pentecostals utilise the flexible spiritual discourses in order to account for why, time and time again, they do not meet the Pentecostal ideal.

A fourth debate considers the formal and explicit socio-political role that religious institutions can play – essentially the extent to which they can be viewed as civil society organizations that contribute to development, peacebuilding, good governance and the like. It is argued that religious institutions, especially in countries where government and other secular institutions are not trusted or ineffective, have more legitimacy and ability to help people. Usually, such analyses focus on mainline denominations’ initiatives in this type of involvement. Pentecostals, by contrast, are often criticized for their total lack of explicit political engagement. Some point out that Pentecostals simply avoid any talk of politics entirely, and that they therefore have no political role or, looking at it slightly differently, that their non-involvement in formal politics makes them very uniquely political. In terms of the social role of Pentecostals, many scholars similarly point out the relatively limited role that Pentecostal churches play, especially when compared to mainline denominations and

secular organizations. Miller and Yamamori are among the few scholars who have argued that Pentecostal churches are especially strong in terms of positive social engagement, but even they point out that such churches are probably not typical of all Pentecostal churches around the world. In Liberia, it is clear that the Pentecostal churches do very little in terms of formal social and political engagement, and that their involvement with socio-political issues is very spiritualized. While we can say with certainty that Pentecostal churches in Liberia cannot be considered a form of civil society as most would describe it, we cannot so easily evaluate the implications of the spiritualization of socio-political events.

Because of this point – that Pentecostals put socio-political issues in spiritual terms, and deal with socio-political problems using spiritual activities – it was necessary to do a case study of a specific socio-political issue, in this case the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to evaluate what some of the specific implications of this spiritualization were. Of course, Pentecostalism plays many roles, but this case study enabled us to look deeply into one implicit role that this spiritual worldview holds in a particular context.

Here we evaluated the implicit role of Pentecostal spiritual worldviews with respect to peacebuilding; it was suggested that peacebuilding might be occurring from below, specifically within the Pentecostal churches. The data collected for these cases studies suggested that Pentecostal churches, as an unintended consequence, were achieving many of the goals that the TRC had set for itself, but was unable to achieve. More specifically, it was found that Pentecostal churches provided their own methods for making sense of the war, post-war forgiveness, reconciliation, trauma-healing and being positive and forward-looking. Pentecostalism gave people a discourse with

which they could think about, articulate, and act upon the morally difficult decisions they had to make regarding post-conflict forgiveness and reconciliation, and the Pentecostal worldview also gave them a framework within which they could see reasons to look forward and hope for a better future.

These findings are important when dealing with debates surrounding what constitutes effective and meaningful socio-political activity in Sub-Saharan Africa. While many authors ignore the religious dimension altogether and thus it is not surprising that they do not perceive spiritual discourses to be important in their analyses, even those authors who take a detailed look at religion are reluctant to look too deeply in to the implicit role of religion or, if they do look into it, are doubtful of what its socio-political role is or how this could even be measured.

Despite this implicit role that was observed in this particular context, it is necessary to situate this apparent role within the wider role of Pentecostalism in Liberia, referring back to the earlier arguments that show how Liberian Pentecostal discourses are always practical and to be so must remain varied, flexible and adaptable. Thus, it is important to show how Pentecostal opinions and actions surrounding the TRC in particular are similarly practical and, in order to be so, are varied, flexible and adaptable. This was examined by looking at the ways Pentecostals perceived the TRC and individuals involved in the war. It was found that the most people saw the TRC as irrelevant or, worse, harmful for the country because it did not seem practical for the well-being of the country given the fragile peace that people were finally enjoying; instead, it was just ‘opening old wounds’. A better route towards real peacebuilding, Pentecostal Liberians saw, took place in the spirit world. Many Liberians were largely in support of forgiving and forgetting whatever wartime

atrocities had occurred including for some of the most high-profile characters: Charles Taylor, Prince Johnson and Joshua Blahyi. It was found that the Pentecostal reasons for forgiveness were given using detailed, but hugely varied, spiritual idioms. This finding contributes to the debate surrounding the reasons the TRC was considered to be unpopular and ineffective among many Liberians. Pentecostals have found a way to articulate their reasons for not seeing the benefits of the TRC; most basically, it is not practical, while spiritual solutions are. Thus while this case study has contributed important findings regarding the implicit role of Pentecostalism in certain contexts – that it is varied, flexible and adaptable – it has also provided important insights into the reasons that transitional justice mechanisms in Liberia are not as successful as their proponents had hoped.

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## APPENDIX

### *Informant Interviews*

#### **1. Pastor/ Church official/Organizational Heads Extended Interviews**

Name and title	Organization/ Church	Date of Interview(s)	Type of interview
Pastor Joseph G Utah, Head Pastor	Christian Faith Ministries	5 June 2008	Short Survey form with extended notes
Sis. Georgia, Prayer Warrior and Office assistant	CEPC/CHRISEM	20 June 2008; 11 May 2009	Long survey; long interview
Rev. John D Watkins, Founder and Head Pastor	African Glory Pentecostal Church	2 June 2008	Long survey
Pst. Philip Sandi, President of CMC and PUL	Christian Media Center / Press Union of Liberia / Life Tabernacle	4 June 2008	Long survey ; cassette
Rev. Stephen Benda, Head Pastor	SUPC	3 June 2008; 21 March 2009	Long survey and short interview; Long interview
Ven. Archdeacon Alex M Bamba	Church of the Lord (Aladura)	24 June 2008	Long survey he filled in
Pastor Sharif, Pastor	Faith Healing Temple of Jesus Christ	24 June 2008	Long survey he filled in
Rev. Thomas Fulker Flan, Head pastor	Guiding Star Temple	24 June 2008	Long survey he filled in
Anon. female pastor, Pastor	Lutheran Church of Liberia	24 June 2008	Long survey she filled in
Pastor Taka, Pastor and Prayer Warrior	CEPC/CHRISEM	2 July 2008	Long survey
Pastor Anon, Pastor and Prayer warrior	CEPC/CHRISEM	2 July 2008	Long survey
Pastor Alfred Wonsieh, Pastor and Prayer Warrior	CEPC/CHRISEM	2 July 2008	Long survey
Deacon Albert Butler, Head evangelist and office assistant	CEPC/CHRISEM	6 June 2008	Long interview

Pastor Roland Yakeson and Bishop Emmanuel Lloyd	PAWOM	11 Mar 2008; 31 May 2008	Long survey; long interview
Mother Laverne Innis, Women's Desk at LCC; President of EWO	Episcopal Church; Liberian Council of Churches, Ecumenical Women's Org	24 June 2008	Long survey and short interview
Rev. Kokeh Kotee, Assistant Pastor	Christian Fellowship Church of Liberia / Africa for Jesus	4 April 2008	Long survey he filled out
E. Sifra Freeman, Head Pastor	Believer's Church / Africa for Jesus	3 April 2008, 9 Feb 2008	Long survey and long interview
Rev. Darvey Moore, Founder and head pastor	Faith in Jesus Christ Ministries	6 April 2008	Long survey
Pastor Anthony Nagbe, Assistant Pastor	Winner's Chapel	9 June 2008	Long interview
Pastor Nya Martins, Head Pastor	Winner's Chapel	23 June 2008	Long interview
Rev CK Dagadu, Founder and Head Pastor	CEPC/CHRISEM	9 June 2008; 16 June 2008; 20 June 2008	Long interview
Dr. Benjamin Lartey, President	LCC	24 June 2008	Short interview
Pastor Solomon Olaife, Head Pastor	Winner's Chapel	4 December 2007 and 26 June 2008	Long interviews
Victoria Wollie, Vice-President	Association of Evangelicals of Liberia	2 July 2008	Long interview
Bishop Jerome Klivo, President	African Independent Churches Association	4 July 2008	Short interview
Zeor Bernard, Vice President	Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia	1 April 2008	Short interview
Mohammad Shariff (Sheik) and Beatrice Seebo (Assistant)	Interreligious Council of Liberia	23 April 2008	Long interview
Cllr. Clarence Simpson	Government of Liberia, Ministry of Justice	15 April 2008	Long interview
Rev. St John York, Head of Interfaith Desk	Liberian Council of Churches	31 Mar 2008; 12 Feb 2008	Long interviews

Pastor Richard Wreh, Pastor	United Methodist Church	29 Mar 2008, 29 Feb 2008, 8 Feb 2008	Long interviews
George Barpeen, President	Press Union of Liberia	26 Mar 2008	Short interview
Rev. Peter Darvin, Head Pastor and Co-Founder	African Glory Church	10 Mar 2008	Long interview
Rev. Emmanuel Bowier	Government of Liberia	4 Mar 2008	Long interview
Thomas Bolay, President	Flomo Theatre	3 Mar 2008	Long interview
Anon. Pastors from Los Angeles	Victory Outreach	1 Mar 2008	Short interview
Rev. George Zorbah, President	Grass Roots Pastors Association	27 Feb 2008	Short interview
Rev. Samuel Reeves, Head pastor	Providence Baptist Church	25 Feb 2008	Long interview
Rev. Adolphys Sommerville, Head pastor	Potters House	7 Feb 2008	Long interview
Frederick Sayeh, Elder Member's Desk	United Methodist Church	1 Feb 2008	Long interview
Pastor Vaye, Head Pastor	Calvary Baptist	25 Jan 2008	Long interview
Sister Margaret, Pastor and Praise team	Sinkor United Pentecostal Church	9 Jan 2008	Long interview
Pastor Steven Bryant, Pastor in training	CEPC/CHRISEM	14 December 2008	Long interview
Rev Williams, Head of Ecumenical Relations Desk	Liberian Council of Churches	4 Feb 2008	Long interview
Pastor Philemon, Head Pastor	Winners' Chapel	15 May 2009	Long interview
Sister Rebecca, Choir member	CEPC/CHRISEM	21 May 2009	Long interview

Pastor Jesse, Head Pastor	Winners' Chapel	27 May 2009	Long interview
Brother AB, Security Unit	Winners' Chapel	25 May 2009	Long interview
Brother Dulan Tucker, Security Unit	Winners' Chapel	23 May 2009	Long interview

## 2. Long Interviews and Surveys With Random Informants

date range of interview	Name	current church	position in church
19-26 May 2008	Patient Brown	no current church	none
19-26 May 2008	Rose Wayee	no current church	none
19-26 May 2008	Beatrice Joe	achiever's arena	music director
19-26 May 2008	abram garbla	First UMC	member
19-26 May 2008	Doris Seywelh	church of living god	member
19-26 May 2008	Albert Wessah	church of christ	member
19-26 May 2008	isaac binda	pentecostal church of liberia	member
19-26 May 2008	Marbel Johnson	good hope baptist church, margibi	member
19-26 May 2008	Jeremiah Barkia	UMC	member
19-26 May 2008	James Flomo	St. John Lutheran, Lofa County	member
19-26 May 2008	Patricia Daye	chuch of God assembly church	member

19-26 May 2008	Wellington S. Harris	good hope baptist church	member
19-26 May 2008	Zoe Mulbah	church of christ	visitor
19-26 May 2008	Nyemade Weah	no current church	
19-26 May 2008	D Christopher Williams	grace baptist	member
May 2-May 10 2008	Rose Robert	life praise chapter church	choir
May 2-May 10 2008	Henrietta A. Steward	georgia pattern UMC	member
May 2-May 10 2008	William D Scott	new creation world outreach christian ministry	usher
May 2-May 10 2008	Monica Sirleaf	ebenezer baptist church	member
May 2-May 10 2008	Lawyo M Harris	greater refuge temple	secretary
May 2-May 10 2008	Stanley Budwin	no church for now	
May 2-May 10 2008	Jeremiiyah Kamgbie	jehovah witness	member
May 2-May 10 2008	Rebecca Davies	christ miracle healing temple	youth fellowship
May 2-May 10 2008	Sam Johnson	providence baptist	member
May 2-May 10 2008	Uriah Doe	gift of healing church	member
May 2-May 10 2008	Glenn J.K Yambay	none	backslider
May 2-May 10 2008	jackie smith	roman catholic	member
May 2-May 10 2008	Phillip dennis	greater refuge temple	member

May 2-May 10 2008	florence doue	greater refuge temple	member
May 2-May 10 2008	john adams	kru town believers church	pastor
May 2-May 10 2008	clifton thomas walker	BW harris episcopal church	member
May 2-May 10 2008	Lewis Carr	Believers Church, Kru Town	youth leader
May 2-May 10 2008	Samuel K Mensah	Believers Church, Kru Town	elder
May 2-May 10 2008	Joseph S Tarplah	Believers Church, Kru Town	elder
May 2-May 10 2008	Marcus Blojay	Believers Church, Kru Town	praiser
May 2-May 10 2008	dominic dixon	jireh intertational church	member
May 2-May 10 2008	harrison teah	Believers Church, Kru Town	pastor
May 2-May 10 2008	Sam Lima	believers church, tieni wonde	secretary
May 2-May 10 2008	samson norman	believers church, tieni wonde	practical pastor
May 11-18, 2008	seyon l tweh	christopolis christian center	member
May 11-18, 2008	louise mccarthy	message of truth center	choir member
May 11-18, 2008	eddie gibson	god's endtime army	member
May 11-18, 2008	Rev. oliver g tobey	Christian fellowship ministries, Free way assembly	Head pastor and general overseer
May 11-18, 2008	t. Borwillie Toplah	christ disciples ministries, etc.	planter/pastor
May 11-18, 2008	Rev patrick a wisdom	god's anointed ambassadors ministries	pastor

27 may- 4 june 2008	Benedict cole	good hope baptist church, marshall	member
27 may- 4 june 2008	garsu jacob	UMC	member
27 may- 4 june 2008	christina r chea	presbyterian church	member
27 may- 4 june 2008	arthur morris	bethel world outreach	member
27 may- 4 june 2008	sunnaway yarforgai	no current church	member
27 may- 4 june 2008	henry bestman	UMC	member
27 may- 4 june 2008	daniel peabody	UMC	member
27 may- 4 june 2008	romeo sala johnson	pentecostal church	youth secretary
27 may- 4 june 2008	linda harris	the christian faith ministry	member
27 may- 4 june 2008	george wakai	pentecostal church	member
27 may- 4 june 2008	peter anthony nimely	no current church	visitor
27 may- 4 june 2008	amah kamara	church of christ	member
27 may- 4 june 2008	foday barsay	bethel world outreach	member
27 may- 4 june 2008	willie buida	no current church	visitor
27 may- 4 june 2008	amos papa doe	bethel world outreach	member
27 may- 4 june 2008	george kamara	AGM church	member
27 may- 4 june 2008	washington sarkee	jj powell	member

12-22 june 2008	Anon	jj powell methodist	member
12-22 june 2008	Anon	good hope baptist church, marshall	clerk
12-22 june 2008	Anon	UMC	member
12-22 june 2008	Anon	episcopal	visitor
12-22 june 2008	Anon	church of christ	member
12-22 june 2008	Anon	no current church	visitor
12-22 june 2008	Anon	UMC	visitor
12-22 june 2008	Anon	pentecostal church	member
12-22 june 2008	Anon	no current church	member
12-22 june 2008	Anon	lutheran	member
12-22 june 2008	Anon	pentecostal church	member
12-22 june 2008	Anon	no church	visitor
12-22 june 2008	Anon	lutheran church, old road	visitor
12-22 june 2008	Anon	jj powell UMC	member
12-22 june 2008	Anon	presbyterian church	member
12-22 june 2008	winton wright	UMC marshall	youth secretary
12-22 june 2008	morsho massaguoi	bethel world outreach	member

12-22 june	godfrey cooper	zion grove baptist	member
12-22 june 2008	akie kromah	newport street mosque	
6 May 2008	nowah gromah	jehovah witness	dismembered member
6 May 2008	thomas b flomo	bethel world outreach, slipway	head usher
12-22 june 2008	harrison T Togar	POT mission church	member
6 May 2008	barbara diggs	st. stephen episcopal	
12-22 june 2008	jimmy miller	roman catholic	member
12-22 june 2008	Olivia babygirl joe	good hope baptist church marshall	member
12-22 june 2008	arthur k. smiths	no current church, visitor	visitor
12-22 june 2008	joseph vprey	fellowship bible church	member
12-22 june 2008	janet bonerd	no church because I have a lack of church materials	visitor
12-22 june 2008	oretha anderson	UMC	regular member
12-22 june 2008	tannue mulbah	pentecostal	youth president
12-22 june 2008	emmanuel youjay	winner's chapel	security unit
12-22 june 2008	mistress zoduwah	SUPC	choir member and Sunday school teacher
12-22 june 2008	Cecilia	CEPC HQ	choir member, caring committee (visit sick), praise team

12-22 june 2008	Tracy	CEPC HQ	member, still in class
12-22 june 2008	Daniel Cooper	bethel world outreach	member
12-22 june 2008	jo kollie	First UMC	member
12-22 june 2008	Shedra Sanga	winner's chapel	head of evangelism unit, counselling, bookstore, teach foundation school
12-22 june 2008	Nathaniel Tamba	apostolic faith of greater refuse temple	elder youth
12-22 june 2008	Michael Howard	greater refuge temple	member
	bobby reeves	church of god prophesy	usher
12-22 june 2008	jeffrey tolbert	faith healing temple	member, outreach department
12-22 june 2008	Kolako M Korvah	life tabernacle	member
12-22 june 2008	Anon	sacred heart cathedral parish	member
12-22 june	Anon	living water baptist	member
12-22 june 2008	albert same nagbe	UPC	member
12-22 june 2008	roseline cooper	living water baptist	visitor
12-22 june 2008	yassah koffa	baptist	visitor
12-22 june 2008	joanna a yah	st. john lutheran, bong	choir member
12-22 june 2008	hawa sirleaf	bethel world outreach	member

12-22 june 2008	Jartu bindu	no church	visitor
20-26 june 2008	Anon	first UMC	member
20-26 june 2008	Anon	living water baptist	member
20-26 june 2008	Anon	UMC	member
20-26 june 2008	Anon	good hope baptist church	choir member
20-26 june 2008	Anon	bethel world outreach	member
20-26 june 2008	Anon	presbyterian	member
20-26 june 2008	Anon	first pentecostal	member
20-26 june 2008	Anon	bethel world outreach	member
20-26 june 2008	Anon	no church still waiting for a church	visitor
20-26 june 2008	Anon	UMC	member
20-26 june 2008	Anon	baptist church of marshall city	member
28 apr - 5 may 2008	victor y sulon jr	st. matthew lutheran paynesville	choir member
28 apr - 5 may 2008	john mark conteh	greater refuge temple	member
28 apr - 5 may 2008	abel gray	cathedral catholic	member
28 apr - 5 may 2008	joel carpenter	mosque	
28 apr - 5 may 2008	geneva harris	no church	

28 apr - 5 may 2008	fenton s smith	methodist	member
28 apr - 5 may 2008	abraham j duoe	jj powell UMC	coordinator of childrens ministry
28 apr - 5 may 2008	stephen a doe	life tabernacle	member
28 apr - 5 may 2008	abraham a flomo	AME empowerment christian	member
28 apr - 5 may 2008	charles dove	mount nebo baptist church	member
28 apr - 5 may 2008	cheakotte lewis	cathedral catholic	
28 apr - 5 may 2008	sally sullan	world wide church	help ministry
28 apr - 5 may 2008	silas manna chinaka	prepare family bible church	pastor
28 apr - 5 may 2008	salifu freeman	no church	member
28 apr - 5 may 2008	moses c davies	grace embassy	assistant pastor
28 apr - 5 may 2008	edward d bassie	emmanuel holy ghost healing church, new georgia	member
28 apr - 5 may 2008	dlecia nyamal harris	the door christian fellowship	Sunday school teacher
28 apr - 5 may 2008	princess yah	church of pentecost	praiser
28 apr - 5 may 2008	idrissa l sowa	first agm	member
4 may 2008	Darling Hanson	victory chapel 8th street	small church, no position yet
4 may 2008	Emilia Scott	DUNAM	member
6 May 2008	deniton nyath	jehovah witness	not full member

6 May 2008	ester colie	sda	childrens dept
6 May 2008	s wellington she	no church	
6 May 2008	godfrey bartuah	latter day saints - mormon	new member
28 apr - 5 may, 2008	john peter	mosque	member

### 3. Short Interviews and Surveys With Random Informants

3-Jun-2008	anon	UPC - soul clinic branch	prayer department
4-Jun-2008	Anna Harris	SUPC	member
4-Jun-2008	Mary Zawu	SUPC	member
4-Jun-2008	Kebeh Jallah	SUPC	usher board
4-Jun-2008	Francis	SUPC	none
5-Jun-2008	Anon	CEPC Paynesville	choir member
5-Jun-2008	Edmon Freeman	SDA	deacon
5-Jun-2008	Anon	deeper life, bypass	evangelist
5-Jun-2008	pastor joseph g utay	Christian Faith ministry , pentecostal	head pastor/founder/ general overseer
5-Jun-2008	Anon	great commission victory temple, lower virginia	MC - conduct the service
5-Jun-2008	Anon	lakpazee community church, not pentecostal	member
5-Jun-2008	Anon	TRANSCEA jamaica road	member

5-Jun-2008	Anon	AMEZion, Benson Street	officer (for long-term membership) and child care
5-Jun-2008	Josie	CEPC /CHRISEM	used to be secretary, now just member. I had to quit because I had a relationship that was not allowed
5-Jun-2008	Anon	bethel world outreach cathedral of hope	usher
6-Jun-2008	Anon	CEPC HQ	choir member
6-Jun-2008	Anon	CEPC Paynesville	visitor, will become a member soon
11-Jun-2008	Anon	Full Gospel - clay street, pentecostal	member
11-Jun-2008	Anon	UMC caldwell	member
12-Jun-2008	Anon	providence baptist church	assistant childrens ministry
12-Jun-2008	Rev. dagadu's driver	salvation church of nazareth	member
14-Jun-2008	Anon	victory temple	president of the choir
20-Jun-2008	Anon	CEPC Paynesville	secretariat
24-Jun-2008	Anon	CEPC HQ	VP of usher board
26-Jun-2008	Anon	CEPC HQ	becoming a member
26-Jun-2008	Anon	Bethel World outreach, Bong	elder
26-Jun-2008	pastor boimahs wife	CEPC Paynesville	was praiser in other church
27-Jun-2008	Anon	CEPC Paynesville	member

27-Jun-2008	Anon	faith healing temple	usher
28-Jun-2008	Anon	CEPC HQ	choir
30-Jun-2008	Anon	mighty fortress Pentecostal	deacon
30-Jun-2008	Anon	Praise sanctuary in Gardnerville, episcopal in gbarnga	MC - conduct the service
30-Jun-2008	Anon	catholic	member
30-Jun-2008	Anon	mighty fortress	praiser
2-Jul-2008	Anon	no church	visitor
4-Jul-2008	Anon	CEPC HQ	intercessor, CHRISEM office assistant
4-Jul-2008	Anon	st. joseph catholic	visitor
12-22 June 2008	Anon	jj powell UMC	children choir
12-22 June 2008	etta brooks	SDA	children choir member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	open bible church	children choir president
12-22 June 2008	oral nyemah	holy chapel of god	choir directress
12-22 June 2008	john kamon	episcopal	choir member
12-22 June 2008	love lincoln	faith in god	choir member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	first baptist	choir member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	first pentecostal	choir member
12-22 June 2008	jimmy briggs	jj powell UMC	choir member

12-22 June 2008	tina girl dowe	living water baptist	choir member
12-22 June 2008	venissa reta wright	living water Baptist	choir member
12-22 June 2008	moses walkder	Methodist	choir member
12-22 June 2008	cherish dickson	mission for today	choir member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	mount calvary	choir member
12-22 June 2008	love king	samuel doe church	choir member
12-22 June 2008	james weah	UMC	choir member
12-22 June 2008	joe sackie	UMC	choir member
12-22 June 2008	joseph daddyboy saunder	good hope Baptist church	choir member and youth president
12-22 June 2008	Anon	12 apostolic Pentecostal church	church clerk
12-22 June 2008	Anon	bethel world outreach	deacon
12-22 June 2008	robert t williams	episcopal	deacon
12-22 June 2008	Anon	first UMC	deacon
12-22 June 2008	willie g harris	Presbyterian	deacon
12-22 June 2008	Anon	SDA	Junior choir member
12-22 June 2008	j benedict sawyer	AGM	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	AGM	member
12-22 June 2008	benedict jacob	baptist	member

12-22 June 2008	joyce aha dumbar	baptist	member
12-22 June 2008	martin harris	baptist	member
12-22 June 2008	peter j johnson	baptist	member
12-22 June 2008	tamba fallah	baptist	member
12-22 June 2008	willie thomas	baptist	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	baptist	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	baptist	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	baptist	member
12-22 June 2008	abraham sirleaf	bethel world outreach	member
12-22 June 2008	amos benson	bethel world outreach	member
12-22 June 2008	andrew smith	bethel world outreach	member
12-22 June 2008	arnold akoi	bethel world outreach	member
12-22 June 2008	korlu forday	bethel world outreach	member
12-22 June 2008	wesley oma powell	bethel world outreach	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	bethel world outreach	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	bethel world outreach	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	bethel world outreach	member

12-22 June 2008	mohammad kamara	center street mosque	member
12-22 June 2008	mamie david	christ ministry	member
12-22 June 2008	patience howard	christ the king	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	christian fellowship	member
12-22 June 2008	jimmy anderson	church of christ	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	church of christ	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	church of christ	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	church of faith	member
12-22 June 2008	alice girl mason	church of god	member
12-22 June 2008	etta zoko	church of god	member
12-22 June 2008	hawa kromah	church of god	member
12-22 June 2008	tealar sackie	church of god	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	church of god	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	church of god	member
12-22 June 2008	asha rose dukuly	episcopal	member
12-22 June 2008	james flomo	episcopal	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	episcopal	member
12-22 June 2008	alvin mulbah	faith healing temple	member

12-22 June 2008	Anon	faith healing temple	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	faith healing temple	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	first pentecostal	member
12-22 June 2008	andy mccauley	good hope baptist church	member
12-22 June 2008	mark a thomas	greater refuge temple	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	holy church of god	member
12-22 June 2008	amos passaway	jj powell UMC	member
12-22 June 2008	nancy garbla	jj powell UMC	member
12-22 June 2008	alice lewis	lutheran church	member
12-22 June 2008	jacob briggs	lutheran church	member
12-22 June 2008	leo yah	lutheran church	member
12-22 June 2008	romeo mccauley	lutheran church	member
12-22 June 2008	karina doweh	methodist	member
12-22 June 2008	martha saifa	methodist	member
12-22 June 2008	oretha sando	methodist	member
12-22 June 2008	sumo p miller	methodist	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	methodist	member
12-22 June 2008	losene b kamara	mosque	member

12-22 June 2008	Anon	mosque	member
12-22 June 2008	boye togbah	open bible church	member
12-22 June 2008	richard s moore	open bible church	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	open bible church	member
12-22 June 2008	andrew philip	pentecostal	member
12-22 June 2008	barryance smith	pentecostal	member
12-22 June 2008	hawa brown	pentecostal	member
12-22 June 2008	henry kollie	pentecostal	member
12-22 June 2008	nathaniel chea	pentecostal	member
12-22 June 2008	prince zubah waltar	pentecostal	member
12-22 June 2008	saylee phiips	pentecostal	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	pentecostal	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	pentecostal	member
12-22 June 2008	jessee solomon	presbyterian	member
12-22 June 2008	peter a benson	presbyterian	member
12-22 June 2008	precious konah	presbyterian	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	presbyterian	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	presbyterian	member

12-22 June 2008	augustine belleh	SDA	member
12-22 June 2008	victoria harris	SDA	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	SDA	member
12-22 June 2008	hellena zayzay	st peter lutheran	member
12-22 June 2008	arthur pewee	UMC	member
12-22 June 2008	jerry king	UMC	member
12-22 June 2008	patricia sumo	UMC	member
12-22 June 2008	princess toe	UMC	member
12-22 June 2008	varflay james toe	UMC	member
12-22 June 2008	wilton momo taylor	UMC	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	UMC	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	wilker chapel (winners?)	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	winners chapel	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	winners chapel	member
12-22 June 2008	joshephine daye	world wide church	member
12-22 June 2008	teah vivian doe	world wide church	member
12-22 June 2008	Anon	mosque	member of mosque
12-22 June 2008	korlu brown	baptist	praise and worship leader

12-22 June 2008	peter asiah	church of christ	praise and worship leader
12-22 June 2008	augustine weah	free pentecostal church	praise and worship leader
12-22 June 2008	jacob prout	pentecostal	spiritual father
12-22 June 2008	lucinda johnson harris	good hope baptist church	spiritual mother
12-22 June 2008	Anon	church of god m	usher
12-22 June 2008	senee kerkula	first UMC	usher
12-22 June 2008	Anon	First UMC	usher
12-22 June 2008	florence myers	methodist	usher
12-22 June 2008	anthony kollie	baptist	visitor
12-22 June 2008	anthony baryougar	church of christ	visitor
12-22 June 2008	mercy willie	first baptist	visitor
12-22 June 2008	abraham kroman	no church	visitor
12-22 June 2008	buster k jones	no church	visitor
12-22 June 2008	henry kangaraway	no church	visitor
12-22 June 2008	joseph kollie	no church	visitor
12-22 June 2008	lennie kamara	no church	visitor
12-22 June 2008	mary a dennis	no church	visitor
12-22 June 2008	oral karmoh	no church	visitor

12-22 June 2008	richard m wieh	no church	visitor
12-22 June 2008	solomon thomas	no church	visitor
12-22 June 2008	Anon	no church	visitor
12-22 June 2008	rebecca johnson	no curch	visitor
12-22 June 2008	anthony pewee	none	visitor
12-22 June 2008	benedict brown	none	visitor
12-22 June 2008	jeremiah nimley	none	visitor
12-22 June 2008	john fallah	none	visitor
12-22 June 2008	john nigermouh	none	visitor
12-22 June 2008	precious dicks	st. michael	visitor
12-22 June 2008	Anon	bethel world outreach	youth president
12-22 June 2008	princess brown	samuel doe church	youth president
12-22 June 2008	musu cole	UMC	youth president
12-22 June 2008	Anon	baptist	youth secretary
12-22 June 2008	josephine freeman	faith healing ministry	youth secretary
12-22 June 2008	samuel farley	UMC	youth secretary
12-22 June 2008	Anon	UPC	youth secretary
12-22 June 2008	manyerson barnard	world wide church	youth secretary

12-22 June 2008	Anon	mosque	member
12-22 June 2008	samua bility	no church	none
12-22 June 2008	Anon	none	none
19-26 May 2008	Amos Jackson	Bethel World	choir member
19-26 May 2008	Davidetta Smiths	JJ power methodist	choir member
19-26 May 2008	Korto Harris	Pentecostal church	choir member
19-26 May 2008	Anthony Wessah	UMC	choir member
19-26 May 2008	Christiana Smiths	AG church	choirster
19-26 May 2008	Momo Zazay	lutheran church	church clerk
19-26 May 2008	Arthur Benson	St. John Lutheran	elder
19-26 May 2008	Ma Matilda Konah	UMC	head of the women's department
19-26 May 2008	Christiana Doue	JJ power methodist	jr. choir member
19-26 May 2008	David Benson	12 apostle church	member
19-26 May 2008	Crystal Jallah	AGM	member
19-26 May 2008	Amos Berryogar	Baptist	member
19-26 May 2008	James Thomas	Baptist	member
19-26 May 2008	Jimmy Sirleaf	Bethel	member
19-26 May 2008	nelly peinee	bethel	member

19-26 May 2008	Josephine Passaway	Bethel World	member
19-26 May 2008	Shadrach Fofana	center mosque	member
19-26 May 2008	Tutu-girl Johnson	church of christ	member
19-26 May 2008	Melvin Worbah	church of god	member
19-26 May 2008	Josephine Pewee	First UMC	member
19-26 May 2008	Benedict Nyemah	Living Water Baptist church	member
19-26 May 2008	Geneva Jallah	lutheran church	member
19-26 May 2008	Jame Broinn	Methodist	member
19-26 May 2008	Wesley McCauley	Methodist	member
19-26 May 2008	Prince Doe	none	member
19-26 May 2008	Joseph Barsee	Pentecostal church	member
19-26 May 2008	Samuel Johnson	Pentecostal church	member
19-26 May 2008	Konah Brown	Presbyterian	member
19-26 May 2008	Richard Davidson	Presbyterian	member
19-26 May 2008	Zoe Bonard	Presbyterian	member
19-26 May 2008	Rufus Sesay	UMC	member
19-26 May 2008	George Dwana	none	none
19-26 May 2008	Rose Sango	none	none

19-26 May 2008	Francis Sango	no current church	visitor
19-26 May 2008	Hawa Kamara	no current church	visitor
19-26 May 2008	James Kesselly	no current church	visitor
19-26 May 2008	Naomi Russell	no current church	visitor
19-26 May 2008	Patricia Toe	no current church	visitor
19-26 May 2008	Alice Gibson	none	visitor
19-26 May 2008	Bendu Sonnie Kollie	none	visitor
19-26 May 2008	Bessie Doue	none	visitor
19-26 May 2008	cecelia massequai	none	visitor
19-26 May 2008	Janet Russell	none	visitor
19-26 May 2008	Joseph Barsah	none	visitor
19-26 May 2008	Mary Sango	none	visitor
19-26 May 2008	Philip Lamie	none	visitor
19-26 May 2008	George Togbah	Pentecostal church	youth secretary
19-26 May 2008	john mensah	none	none
19-26 May 2008	Anon		
20-26 June 2008	Anon	providence baptist church	choir
20-26 June 2008	Anon	first pentecostal	choir member

20-26 June 2008	Anon	UMC	choir member
20-26 June 2008	Anon	open bible church	clerk
20-26 June 2008	Anon	presbyterian	elder
20-26 June 2008	Anon	bethel world outreach	member
20-26 June 2008	Anon	center street mosque	member
20-26 June 2008	Anon	church of christ	member
20-26 June 2008	Anon	faith healing temple	member
20-26 June 2008	Anon	free baptist	member
20-26 June 2008	Anon	good hope baptist church	member
20-26 June 2008	Anon	greater refuge temple	member
20-26 June 2008	Anon	jj powell UMC	member
20-26 June 2008	Anon	king's believers church	member
20-26 June 2008	Anon	methodist	member
20-26 June 2008	Anon	SUPC	member
20-26 June 2008	Anon	SUPC	member
20-26 June 2008	Anon	SUPC	member of mens group
20-26 June 2008	sis margaret	SUPC	minister and admin assistant
20-26 June 2008	Anon	church of pentecost	spiritual mother

20-26 June 2008	Anon	SUPC	womens wings
20-26 June 2008	Anon	SUPC	womens wings
20-26 June 2008	Anon	SUPC	youth
20-26 June 2008	Anon	lutheran church	youth secretary
20-26 June 2008	Anon	none	none
27 May- 4 June 2008	yamie sompon	good hope baptist church	choir member
27 May- 4 June 2008	peter kollie	living water	choir member
27 May- 4 June 2008	tete suchollie	christian faith	church clerk
27 May- 4 June 2008	mary wessah	methodist church	church clerk
27 May- 4 June 2008	mary noh	peter wleh church	deacon
27 May- 4 June 2008	gabriel barquolleh	holy church of god	elder
27 May- 4 June 2008	derry togar	jj powell	Junior choir member
27 May- 4 June 2008	melvin gemmis`	baptist	member
27 May- 4 June 2008	witmot jacob	baptist	member
27 May- 4 June 2008	daniel daye	bethel world outreach	member
27 May- 4 June 2008	jeremiah g gibson	bethel world outreach	member
27 May- 4 June 2008	hellena roberts	church of christ	member
27 May- 4 June 2008	sansee johnson	church of christ	member

27 May- 4 June 2008	james d brown	church of god	member
27 May- 4 June 2008	james fineboy	church of god	member
27 May- 4 June 2008	victory nyemah	holy chapel church	member
27 May- 4 June 2008	matt wilson	lutheran	member
27 May- 4 June 2008	matthew sando	methodist church	member
27 May- 4 June 2008	asha barclay	pentecostal	member
27 May- 4 June 2008	joseph barkie	pentecostal	member
27 May- 4 June 2008	mary wright	pentecostal	member
27 May- 4 June 2008	marcus miller	pentecostal church	member
27 May- 4 June 2008	robert williams	pentecostal church	member
27 May- 4 June 2008	isaac b mason	presbyterian church	member
27 May- 4 June 2008	joseph perger	presbyterian church	member
27 May- 4 June 2008	williemetal saunder	winner's chapel	member
27 May- 4 June 2008	albert daye	world wide church	member
27 May- 4 June 2008	justina toe	world wide church	member
27 May- 4 June 2008	alex kamara	Mosque	nothing
27 May- 4 June 2008	vicoma cooper	no current church	nothing
27 May- 4 June 2008	meneva nyemah	st. mary catholic	our lady of marshall

27 May- 4 June 2008	fatu kadakai	baptist church	Sunday school teacher
27 May- 4 June 2008	winifred doe	first baptist	visitor
27 May- 4 June 2008	amos johnson	no current church	visitor
27 May- 4 June 2008	anthony sumo	no current church	visitor
27 May- 4 June 2008	mark sam tamba	no current church	visitor
27 May- 4 June 2008	opa yakpaldolo	no current church	visitor
27 May- 4 June 2008	peter amos davidson	no current church	visitor
27 May- 4 June 2008	petersn boye mason	no current church	visitor
27 May- 4 June 2008	tebeth sumo	no current church	visitor
27 May- 4 June 2008	juah davids	st. mary catholic	visitor
27 May- 4 June 2008	geneva doe	bethel world outreach	worship leader
27 May- 4 June 2008	washington sackie	church of god	young precher of the gospel of jesus
27 May- 4 June 2008	paul harrison	jj powell methodist	youth president
27 May- 4 June 2008	jerry king	lutheran	youth secretary
27 May- 4 June 2008	jimmy passaway	no current church	none
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	sunaywai smith	apostolic church	choir directress
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	marie jacobs	little st paul EC church	chorus
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	izatta kebeh	agm	member

28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	tomah dome	Agm	member
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	oral dome	AGM	member
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	martha james	baptist church	member
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	prince harding	baptist church	member
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	sameul s mentoe	cepc	member
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	malese brown	ebenezer baptist church	member
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	monirca sirleaf	ebenezer baptist church	member
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	francis a musa	elohim	member
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	samuel dbarpah	empowerment church	member
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	newton morris	first UMC	member
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	hotelo manjea	georgia pattern UMC	member
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	amos flomo	lutheran church	member
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	richard goll	methodist	member
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	stephen kollie	methodist	member
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	josephine hoe	potter house church	member
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	mahwee dweh	providence baptist church	member
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	james johnson	st. peter lutheran church	member
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	shad smalood	thankful baptist church	member

28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	martialine paygar	world wide church	member
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	kalu kiah	first baptist	usher
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	domawah d kollie	first baptist	visitor
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	alice yeamah	no church	visitor
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	arthur miller	no church	visitor
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	james johnson	no church	visitor
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	sarah kollie	no church	visitor
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	esther brown	sda	visitor
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	david diggs jr	world wide church	youth secretary
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	mary sauner	no church	none
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	sam gibson	no church	none
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	amos yarkepwolo	none	none
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	fred sumo	none	none
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	james smith	none	none
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	john yah	none	none
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	josephine gibson	none	none
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	oma john williams	none	none
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	oretha Mayson	none	none

28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	paul soloman	none	none
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	peter nah	none	none
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	mary roberts	wilifield UMC	none
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	Anon		
28 Apr - 5 May, 2008	Anon		
May 11-18, 2008	judu passaway	church of christ	choir member
May 11-18, 2008	samuel jackson	methodist	choir member
May 11-18, 2008	jenkins otis lakula	AME Zion	member
May 11-18, 2008	geneva harris	baptist church	member
May 11-18, 2008	isaac dennis	baptist church	member
May 11-18, 2008	otis benson	baptist church	member
May 11-18, 2008	ben wilson	bethel world outreach	member
May 11-18, 2008	john kerzulu	bethel world outreach	member
May 11-18, 2008	anthony Sundayboy vainie	catholic	member
May 11-18, 2008	james russell	church of god	member
May 11-18, 2008	mary ansah	church of the pentecost	member
May 11-18, 2008	rachel girl nagbee	churhc of god	member
May 11-18, 2008	naomi korto atuoi	lutheran	member

May 11-18, 2008	cecelia kollie	lutheran church	member
May 11-18, 2008	stephen peabody	Pentecostal	member
May 11-18, 2008	samuel benson	SDA	member
May 11-18, 2008	reta dukuly	UMC	member
May 11-18, 2008	bendu kanakai	winner's chapel	member
May 11-18, 2008	solomon davis	world wide church	member
May 11-18, 2008	nelly johnson	world wide church	praise and worship member
May 11-18, 2008	sentee kerkula	lutheran church	secretary of the choir department
May 11-18, 2008	james jallah	free pentecostal church	treasurer
May 11-18, 2008	wellington special harris	baptist church	visitor
May 11-18, 2008	zoe dweh	church of god	visitor
May 11-18, 2008	prince togar	jj power church	visitor
May 11-18, 2008	lasene Sheriff	mosque	visitor
May 11-18, 2008	alfred amara kamara	no current church	visitor
May 11-18, 2008	amos brown	no current church	visitor
May 11-18, 2008	amos sally johnson	no current church	visitor
May 11-18, 2008	augustine chea	no current church	visitor
May 11-18, 2008	chris togar	no current church	visitor

May 11-18, 2008	Ebenezer Saye	no current church	visitor
May 11-18, 2008	emmanuel georgie	no current church	visitor
May 11-18, 2008	esther dah	no current church	visitor
May 11-18, 2008	fatu momo	no current church	visitor
May 11-18, 2008	Florence Jackie Gray	no current church	visitor
May 11-18, 2008	gayflor mulbah	no current church	visitor
May 11-18, 2008	george sackie	no current church	visitor
May 11-18, 2008	Hawa Kamara	no current church	visitor
May 11-18, 2008	isaac dahn	no current church	visitor
May 11-18, 2008	james solomon	no current church	visitor
May 11-18, 2008	jenneh johnson	no current church	visitor
May 11-18, 2008	joseph forkpa	no current church	visitor
May 11-18, 2008	Junior togba	no current church	visitor
May 11-18, 2008	mark doue	no current church	visitor
May 11-18, 2008	tamba forday	no current church	visitor
May 11-18, 2008	leo geplay	pentecostal fire	youth president
May 11-18, 2008	philip jallah	living water baptist	youth secretary
May 11-18, 2008	bombo nyermah	living water baptist	member

May 11-18, 2008	benedict toe	no current church	none
May 2-May 10 2008	dahba jobatah	sacred heart cathedral parish	altar server
May 2-May 10 2008	nancy garblo	worldwide mission church	children choir
May 2-May 10 2008	oliver manango tarpeh	pentecostal church	choir member
May 2-May 10 2008	saturmai yesforgai	united pentecostal church	choir member
May 2-May 10 2008	Garyalo Dee Gbolzio	better living SDA	choirister
May 2-May 10 2008	rosetta b kromah	du-port road baptist church	choirister
May 2-May 10 2008	mamadu kromah	benson st. mosque	member
May 2-May 10 2008	bendu gray	bethel world church	member
May 2-May 10 2008	henry tonoia toe	bethel world outreach	member
May 2-May 10 2008	dominic m allen	cathedral church	member
May 2-May 10 2008	joseph passaway	center mosque	member
May 2-May 10 2008	nimley toe	church of god	member
May 2-May 10 2008	rose doe	cravery temple church	member
May 2-May 10 2008	tito a davies	don steward pentecostal church	member
May 2-May 10 2008	althony saunder	good hope baptist church	member
May 2-May 10 2008	john davis	lutheran church	member
May 2-May 10 2008	thomas momo	mosque	member

May 2-May 10 2008	Oretha Saye	pentecostal church	member
May 2-May 10 2008	zoe johnson	pentecostal church	member
May 2-May 10 2008	benedict harris	providence baptist	member
May 2-May 10 2008	bro zayzay sopie	sacred heart cathedral parish	member
May 2-May 10 2008	etta k brooks	SDA Church	member
May 2-May 10 2008	prince harris	st. john lutheran	member
May 2-May 10 2008	Precious Mason	st. peter lutheran church	member
May 2-May 10 2008	peter fineboy	UMC	member
May 2-May 10 2008	augustine kollie	UMC	member
May 2-May 10 2008	nancy diggs	world wild mission church	member
May 2-May 10 2008	theresa garbla	worldwide mission church	member
May 2-May 10 2008	jonathon monger	rapture baptist church	member of men department
May 2-May 10 2008	ma yawee yango	SDA Church	mother (former)
May 2-May 10 2008	mother ruth c monger	rapture baptist church	prayer team leader
May 2-May 10 2008	mariam fallah	clara town AG church	usher
May 2-May 10 2008	william cooper	trinity cathedral episcopal church	usher
May 2-May 10 2008	Arnold Passway	none	visitor
May 2-May 10 2008	james kerkulah	none	visitor

May 2-May 10 2008	arthur sah	none	visitor
May 2-May 10 2008	teddy james morris	none	visitor
May 2-May 10 2008	wesley chea	none	visitor
May 2-May 10 2008	george wessah	none	visitor
May 2-May 10 2008	Amos Jackson	none	visitor
May 2-May 10 2008	james fallah	none	visitor
May 2-May 10 2008	gormuyu baryoquai	pentecostal church	visitor
May 2-May 10 2008	annie yango	rapture baptist church	visitor
May 2-May 10 2008	kamah fombah	rapture baptist church	youth department
May 2-May 10 2008	laima d gray	star baptist church	youth member
May 2-May 10 2008	edmond steward	never been in a church	none
May 2-May 10 2008	grace j zeons	no church	none
May 2-May 10 2008	josiah johnson jr	none	none
May 2-May 10 2008	massa kamara	none	None
24-May-2008	Jerome K. Mulbah	God's Anointed Ambassadors Ministries, Inc (GAAMIN)	financial chairman
24-May-2008	Min. Alfred Z Boduo, Sr.	God's Anointed Ambassadors Ministries, Inc (GAAMIN)	minister/secretary
22-May-2008	Estella MS Brown	greater refuge temple	
22-May-2008	Geraldine Embreee	greater refuge temple	none

11-May-2008	korto p supoe	full life gospel church	member
11-May-2008	sarah waloyse	catholic	usher
7-May-2008	oliver t nyekiam	SUPC	clerk, youth dept
7-May-2008	harris m zayzay	SUPC	head usher
7-May-2008	ms monjur slnmee grigsby	SUPC	deaf coordinator
17-May-2008	nowah madani	believer's church, kru town	mothers group
17-May-2008	madame carr	believer's church, kru town	usher and lead praiser
17-May-2008	David Sakar	believer's church, kru town	member
17-May-2008	Edward Gborh	believer's church, kru town	member
17-May-2008	ana bellie	believer's church, kru town	member
30-Jun-2008	Mary Davis	strong tower assembly	women's advisor
30-Jun-2008	john chea	all nations living fountain, duala	member
4-May-2008	andrew nelson	all nations living fountain, duala	member
5-May-2008	arthur m kortor sr	all nations living fountain, duala	director of discipleship
5-May-2008	kennedy t soward	all nations living fountain, duala	financial secretary
5-May-2008	h george d willie	all nations living fountain, duala	general secretary