

Globalisation and the New Conquistadores

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Introduction:

We live in a changing world. Who would have believed a few weeks ago that the French colony of Senegal would reach the quarterfinals of the World Cup and holders France not only not qualify from their group but also fail to score a goal! Which of us predicted the collapse of the Berlin wall in 1989 and who amongst us would have predicted 20 years ago that the Non - western Missionary movement would overtake the traditional Western sending agencies?

In this paper I want to examine with you some of the characteristics of globalisation and its impact in terms of a Brazilian Neo-Pentecostal Church which has and is successfully emerging as a transnational church. One of the challenges that Pentecostalism and the Neo-Pentecostal movements in the rapidly expanding new Christian heartlands of sub Saharan Africa, Latin America and parts of Asia, is that they are becoming the normative face of Christianity. Their strategy, their mission practice and theology will become the normative expression of the Christian faith. The twenty second century if Jesus hasn't returned may well see Western theology turned into an academic study for specialists like that of the Patristic Fathers¹. We are living through a paradigm change that impacts the world around us and the church is not unaffected.

1. Globalisation from a Biblical Perspective

There have always been forms of globalisation. The Bible begins in a garden and ends in a city. In Genesis 11 we read that the whole earth had one language and few words and the people wanted to build a city with a great tower and make a name for themselves. According to the story God himself comes to confuse their language and scattered them. Implicit within this is to impede the process of sin. The great Empires of Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, and especially Greece and Rome were an expression in their day of the globalisation process. Interestingly Jesus comes at a time of the famous Pax Romana and Paul and his missionary band took advantage of it. Pentecost can be seen as God's response to Babel in that the language barrier was supernaturally overcome by the Apostolic preaching of the gospel. This wasn't accomplished by everyone hearing the gospel in Koiné Greek the lingua franca of the Eastern Roman Empire but by each hearing the gospel in his and her own heart language. The call to the primitive church by Jesus was **"as the Father sends me so I send you"** a call to incarnational communication of the gospel of contextualising our faith in every culture. A respecting of culture with a redeeming of the positive and radical prophetic denunciation of all that curtails truth and justice in any and all cultures. This is to say the church as a globalised "universal Church" isn't to homogenise everything to its own image but follow the example of Jesus who "tabernacled" amongst us. The heavenly vision in Revelation 5:9 of the ransomed is from: **"Every TRIBE and TONGUE and PEOPLE and NATION."** The importance of this is highlighted by its repetition in 7:9 **"After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every NATION, from all TRIBES and PEOPLES and TONGUES, standing before the Lamb, clothed in white robes..."**

John holds in tension the essential unity and universality of the redeemed with their cultural diversity. I believe this to be one of the key challenges in world mission in today's globalised world.

2. Roots of modern globalisation:

I have already mentioned that there have been historical experiences of the impact of globalisation in the consolidation of the great Empires of the past. Indeed the eventual collapse of the Western Roman Empire had as much to do with the Empire's inability to control the money supply and the corrosive effects of inflation as with the barbarians without.

In modern times a first phase of globalisation was taking place in the period of 1880's - 1914. Britain was still the world super power but the borders of Europe were open from London to St Petersburg. In 1866 the first transatlantic cable was laid down and the crises in banking and stock exchanges in New York were transmitted to London, Paris and Berlin and vice versa. Travel was carried out without recourse to passport and visas, this was also the time of the mass migrations from the Old to the New World. A time of rapid innovation Telegraph, Steamships, Railways and Telephone reduced the world in size. As American author Thomas L Friedman has put it **"... this first era of globalisation before World War I shrank the world from a size "large" to a size "medium"**²

¹ Walls A. The Missionary Movement in Christian History, Orbis Books Maryknoll, New York, USA, 1996. p. 9-10

² Thomas L Friedmann The Lexus and the Olive Tree, Farrar Strauss and Giroux 1999

Other less benign inventions such as the submarine, machine gun and dynamite were also about to shape the world. This first era of globalisation was also characterised by competition of the European imperialistic powers creating newer colonies and markets in Africa and Asia. This first attempt at globalisation and global finance was destroyed by the competition that eventually led to the First World War. This, with the Russian revolution and the Great Depression combined to divide the world geographically and ideologically. The formally divided world that emerged from World War II was then frozen in place by the Cold War. An ideologically divided and fractured world, with the balance of terror being held by the USA and USSR. Two competing economic and ideological systems with western regulated capitalism versus communist autarky (self-sufficiency) Poorer countries attempted either to protect their fledgling industry whilst faster developing ones sought salvation through export-led growth. The world was divided between spheres of influence and the non-aligned - wars were fought by proxy. As things developed we began to talk of First (western) World, Second World (Eastern Bloc) and Third World countries. The symbol of the Cold war was Churchill's description of the Iron Curtain and later the physical reality of the Berlin Wall. Movement of people on an East - West axis all but stopped whilst there was a steady de-colonisation of Africa and Asia and an equally steady flow of people from the South to the dominant economies of the North. The Cold War shaped much of our thinking, our politics

The collapse of the Communist bloc and the symbolic destruction of the Berlin Wall in 1989 also signal in many ways the start of the new second phase of globalisation. It differs from the first in terms of its intensity. Pre 1914 smaller nations experienced it in terms of oppression and imperial colonisation or were just left out of it. In 1900 foreign exchange trading was measured in millions of dollars whereas today we are talking in terms of trillions of dollars. Pre 1914 globalisation was built round ever-cheaper transportation costs today it is centred on microchips, satellites and fibre optics and the Internet. If the symbol of the Cold war was a static Wall in Berlin then the new globalised world is symbolised by a worldwide web.

The dominant western economic free market capitalism and global institutions such as the IMF and World Bank require poorer economies to open up and privatise their national industries - airlines, Ports, Telephone, Oil and mineral deposits.... The selling off of the family jewellery by Latin countries with corrupt regimes have led to the debt crises of the 90's and Argentina is a classic example at present. This is experienced not as imperialistic colonialism of the past but a subtler but equally oppressive neo-colonialism of being wage slaves to the rich west and with no hope and no ability to stand within this process of globalisation and less to stand out against it. There is then a dark side to globalisation.

With this comes a powerful homogenising of culture with an imposed dominant western culture. Franchised designer jeans from Peking to Portsmouth, MacWorld Inc. with the distinctive logos being the order of the day.

On the positive side there has been a democratisation of communications via the web and satellite television. This has given more power to the individual and interest groups that wish to campaign against injustice or divulge the truth.

3. The New Conquistadores - The Universal church of the Kingdom of God

3.1 Beginnings in Brazil

The explosive growth of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in the second half of the twentieth century, with some 500 million adherents worldwide, constitutes the fastest growing segment of present day Christianity. Within this sector the so-called 'Third Wave' of Neopentecostal groups are at the forefront of this growth. Amongst the fastest growing of these is the object of this study, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG).

"The UCKG is a phenomenon of religious growth and success. . . the UCKG now has 2,014 churches in Brazil and 236 in 65 other countries. About 4 million people are assisted by its Bishops, pastors and obreiros (unpaid helpers) in its five daily services. At the same time, in its short existence the UCKG has become worth an estimated \$400 million."³

There is still much research that has to be conducted into how one of the fastest growing Christian movements in the world is inserted or translated into other contexts and specifically here in the United Kingdom. Jules-Rosette argues that Third World countries are creating ideologies, which bring a synthesis of indigenous and Western religious beliefs as part of New Religious Movements.⁴ Although writing about African movements Jules-Rosette's assertion is very applicable as a working hypothesis to the UCKG.

³ Ori A.P. and Semán P. Brazilian Pentecostalism Crosses National Borders article in Between Babylon and Pentecost Corten A. & Marshall-Fratani R. [Eds.] Indiana University Press, Bloomington USA, 2001 p. 183 These are the most recently published figures.

⁴ Jules-Rosette M. The Features of African Theologies - situating New Religious Movements in an epistemological setting. Social Compass, 41 (1) 1994 p. 49-65

Central to this 'working hypothesis' is that the UCKG has created just such a synthesis of indigenous Brazilian and Western religious beliefs. Bishop Macedo has taken strands of the underlying Afro-Brazilian cosmivision and elements of indigenous Brazilian religious practice,⁵ together with Neopentecostal 'faith movement' influences from North America and a Western entrepreneurial business practice. These strands have been woven together to form a new tapestry with a distinctive design of a Brazilian Neopentecostal church that offers a new model of 'doing church'.

In just twenty years the UCKG has become a global player in transnational Pentecostalism. The church has invested much of its time and resources to engage in a process of mission, or rapid 'transnationalisation' of the UCKG denomination. The insertion of this new model of mission in the UK is helped by the existence of ethnic communities of West African and Afro-Caribbean origin that share a similar theological cosmivision to that of the Brazilian missionaries of the UCKG.

At the age of 20, in 1965, Edir Macedo was part of the second wave Pentecostal movement, converting from nominal Catholicism to become a member of the Pentecostal Igreja Nova Vida (New Life Church) where he remained for 10 years. He then joined another Pentecostal church, the Casa de Bençã (House of Blessing), where he was a minister for a number of years.⁶ Macedo and a few members of his congregation moved in 1977 to a room at a Funeral Parlour in Abolição⁷, a suburb on the northern side of Rio de Janeiro, creating the Cruzada do Caminho Eterno (The Eternal Road Crusade). Soon after this was renamed as the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God.

Bishop Macedo developed his new Neopentecostal synthesis amidst the hopes and fears of the emerging upward aspiring poor and lower middle classes, at the time of the military government and the so-called Brazilian 'economic miracle'.⁸ The religious rivals to Macedo are other Pentecostal churches and the Umbanda 'terreiros' (meeting places). The emerging UCKG synthesis offered a more modern spirituality without the restrictive codes of the traditional Pentecostals that Macedo termed 'too fanatical'. There are no dress codes, or cultural restrictions on dancing, the cinema or consumption of alcohol. This was coupled with a promise of social and spiritual liberation.

The UCKG emphasis on the use of the mass media and prosperity teaching reflects the impact of TV evangelists of the Pat Robertson, Jimmy Swaggart and later Benny Hinn style ministries from the USA. These ministries, with their emphasis on intensive use of the mass media, began to impact Latin America in the late 1970's, the formative period of the UCKG.

In 1984, with his churches expanding, Macedo was able to buy Rio Copacabana radio station as the first step in setting up a communications empire. The rapid growth of the movement, the high profile acquisitions of media companies and in particular that of the Record TV network brought the church into the media spotlight. Until this point the church was clearly perceived by the mainline Protestant churches and most other Pentecostal churches as an example of the Brazilian Neopentecostal movement. The main characteristics of which may be summarised as follows:

- **A strong charismatic leader as the focal point**
- **Stimulus to emotional behaviour**
- **Exclusivity to other forms of religion**
- **Preferential use of the mass media**
- **An emphasis on divine healing and exorcism as Spiritual Warfare**
- **Liberalisation of behavioural mores as compared to other Pentecostals**
- **Symbolic actions as an attempt to contextualise their teaching**
- **Prosperity teaching.**

The symbolic practices that continue to be a key element of the UCKG services were perceived by mainline churches to be more akin to the sympathetic magic of Umbanda / Candomblé. It was this, coupled with their isolationist stance, that resulted in them being denied membership of the Brazilian Evangelical Association led at that time by the well-known Presbyterian Caio Fabio D'Araujo Filho.⁹

⁵ By indigenous religious practice includes elements of syncretistic Folk Catholicism with Umbanda (holy salt), Roman Catholic practice that the UCKG has 'recovered' (Episcopal hierarchy, anointing with water and oil), one would also include here Brazilian Pentecostal influences that have largely been 'indigenised' over the past century.

⁶ Berryman P. Religion in the Megacity. Orbis Books, Maryknoll. New York USA 1996, p. 33

⁷ A Fe que move multidões avança no país. Veja, Brazil 16th May 1990, p.48 Early article in a Brazilian Magazine Veja on the growth of Pentecostal groups and their use of television and radio. Most of the 6 page article is dedicated to the UCKG and its leader Edir Macedo.

⁸ The high economic growth that was experienced in the 70s had little 'trickle-down' effect for the most marginalised sectors. The economic stagnation of the 80s had a wider impact. The point I'm making, though, is the ideological propaganda of this period profoundly affected Macedo and the church has an almost ritual approach to money, an emphasis in entrepreneurship and encourages members to form their own businesses as a way of confronting poverty.

⁹ The Brazilian Evangelical Association is the equivalent of the British Evangelical Alliance. After Macedo was gaoled for 12 days in 1992, accused of fraud and embezzlement, many Brazilian Protestants, including Caio Fabio, closed ranks with Macedo to demand that his human rights be respected. Bishop Macedo was later absolved by the Courts.

The UCKG in Brazil is engaged in building a relationship with civil society unlike any other Protestant group. They are actively participating in the political process with 12 deputies being elected in the General Elections of 1994 and this was increased to 28 in 1998. They are at present attempting to launch their own political party the Social Action Party (PAS).¹⁰

In Brazil the UCKG gains a great deal of legitimacy by its social action. They have the ABC a Christian Benefit Association that distributes tons of food and clothing to the poor and street children.¹¹

Bishop Macedo is the unquestioned leader of the UCKG enterprise and retains control of the theological and ideological thrust of the organisation. He has appointed gifted people for key roles within the organisation and has shown a flair for discovering talented people, demonstrated by the continued growth of the UCKG and its diversification into different fields. This apparent diversification into social work, party politics, mass media and revenue raising companies is in fact a single - minded strategy for the global expansion of the UCKG HelpCentre model of mission:

" The UCKG has an audacious concept of mission. All of its economic empire (and political force) is functional for the religious mission."¹²

3.2 Beginnings of the UCKG in Britain

The first UCKG HelpCentre started in February 1995 with three services a week held at the St. Matthew's Church of England in Brixton, a predominantly African Caribbean suburb of south London. In June 1995 they moved to rented premises at 376 Brixton Road and by December they had already outgrown the premises with 350 regularly attending Sunday services and smaller "congregations" at the four daily services.

The initial pioneering team had access, therefore, to some £1,000,000 to establish the work in the UK.¹³ This has clear implications for the missiological practice of the UCKG. Finsbury Park, location of the Rainbow Theatre, which is the HQ of the UCKG in Britain, is a very mixed working-class area of London with Asian, Greek, Irish, black and white communities. Even so, the participation in the Rainbow theatre is about 95% black and this is reflected in all the satellite churches. As Freston has observed, in the English religious world, the UCKG has become almost identified as an African Caribbean church.¹⁴

As the work has continued there are in 2002 nine fully established churches in the Greater London area, and one in Birmingham the second city of the UK. There are a further seven smaller congregations in Greater London and three being established elsewhere in the country. These churches are at Luton, Nottingham and Wolverhampton. By 2000 church attendance was above 3,000 and annual giving a little over £3,000,000. From being a receiver of funding from outside, the London based UCKG had now begun to make donations to sister churches of £1.3 million. In this way the church returned or "donated" £900,000 to its sister church in Brazil.¹⁵

The UCKG has a tripartite structure with an ecclesiastical hierarchy, Charity status and its developing business interests. In early 2000 Brazilian bishops Renato Costa Cardoso and Wellington Marcelo Cardoso, were joined by Bishop Oliver Marcelo from Portugal. The pastors working under them were either Brazilian or Portuguese, with the exception of a single Dutch pastor. There are UK representatives at the lay level of pastoral aides or assistants. There is little emphasis on membership and many that attend have links with or have been members of black-led Pentecostal churches.

In addition to the pastoral staff, the church employs some fifteen administrative staff, including a Press Officer and Adult Training Centre Co-ordinator. Recently, the church has started to diversify with a "Universal Classics" bookshop in Brixton selling clothes, music and books and the acquisition of Radio Liberty in London. Although Bishop Renato Costa Cardoso figured as the Chief Executive, the Radio Station has been left entirely as a commercial station and the church pays for nine hours of programming in early morning and late night slots.

¹⁰ Ori A.P. & Semán P. op.cit p.183

¹¹ They also help institutions that work with handicapped children and orphanages. They run several clinics, in conjunction with the local authorities in the São Paulo area, in which they offer family planning and contraceptives in direct opposition to the Roman Catholic Church. They are involved in refurbishing schools and administering soup kitchens and night shelters.

¹² Freston P. *Pentecostalism in Brazil* op. cit. p.131

¹³ For financial details see "Audited Reports to the Charity Commission".

¹⁴ Paul Freston, "The Transnationalisation of Brazilian Pentecostalism", in André Corten & Ruth Marshall-Fratani (eds.), *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America* (Bloomington & Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 209.

¹⁵ See "Trustees Report for the Charity Commission: Years ending February 1999 and February 2000". The General Fund balance at the 29th of February 2000 was of the order of £4.5 million.

In 2001 a major change in leadership of the UCKG in Britain occurred when Brazilian Bishops Renato Costa Cardoso and Wellington Marcelo Cardoso were moved abroad, leaving Portuguese Bishop Oliver Marcelo as the senior Bishop in the UK.

3.3 Missiological Praxis - the Franchising of the UCKG

In this section we shall examine and analyse some of the missiological strategies used by the UCKG in the UK. They have targeted the West African immigrants, the Afro-Caribbean communities and have a preponderance of women. These are amongst the most marginalised of social groupings in present day Britain. In economic terms the profile of the UK UCKG would appear to be similar to the UCKG in Brazil, working mainly amongst the poor but upwardly aspiring poor, and the lower levels of the middle classes.

The UCKG worldwide is overwhelmingly an urban phenomenon. Typically the UCKG churches meet in highly visible High Street locations, large shops, refurbished cinemas and theatres. The UCKG is extremely image conscious. All of its churches are modelled on the Brazilian mother church. They all use the same logo of the red heart and white dove. They all look to operate with four church services a day, dealing with specific problems for that particular day. Advertising, use of the media and in-house publications, reinforces this and allows them to reach a wide public audience. They use similar web pages. The teaching programmes would also seem to be a global phenomenon.¹⁶ It is not extravagant to claim that they present a recognisable brand image. The red heart and white dove could soon be as recognisable in the religious market place as say a MacDonaldis or a Pizza Hut, in a shopping mall.

The growth of the UK UCKG can be largely, yet not completely, understood as the franchising of a Brazilian multinational company rather than in traditional terms of church planting and mission. The adoption of entrepreneurial business practice by the UCKG leadership in the use of revenue creating funds would appear to influence the way the movement presents itself with a corporate type brand image. This highlights the insertion of the UCKG HelpCentre model within the process of globalisation.

The teaching of the UCKG is not doctrinal and expository but narrative based, infused with symbolic practices that give it an attractive multifaceted, multi-layered approach geared to the practical needs of those attending. It is this lack of a need for an over-arching structural approach to its theology that lends the sense of a post-modernist pragmatic yet emotive spirituality. As Cox points out:

"It may be this polychrome character that makes Pentecostalism so attractive to so many people. Its appeal is multifaceted, and the feature that draws one new believer in may not be what attracts the next one. Indeed, even after they join, because of the multivalency of its teaching and practices, different believers may make something very different of their common Pentecostal faith."¹⁷

A high view is held of the Bible by the UCKG as set out in their conservative Declaration of faith and the many references to it in sermons as the 'Word of God'. Those attending encounter the Scriptures as 'story'. UCKG preachers are expected to be great 'story tellers' and the congregation receives the text as story that is lived out and appropriated for their own life situations. They use a dramaturgical style with use of improvisations and testimonies to reinforce the main theme. This is particularly accessible to unchurched observers. It is largely the style adopted by African and Afro-Caribbean Pentecostal Churches.¹⁸ The preaching is emotional and the preacher will regularly pause and ask those attending **"isn't that right?"** Preaching will normally be followed by an altar call inviting attenders to come forward for prayer related to the topic of the day - finance, healing deliverance etc. All services are permeated by prosperity teaching partly having offering the goal of "re-inventing" oneself as a successful person and around the actual offering. This may take more than 15 minutes with exhortation, prosperity teaching finalising in a type of "dutch auction" where people are invited to come forward with a gift of £200 moving down incrementally to £5, when the majority move forward. They regularly hold "prayer chains" to break sinful habits or achieve personal spiritual goals or life goals. This is continued one day a week for at least a month as a campaign and then adherents are encouraged to come for a special Sunday service. Here they file forward to offer large brown envelopes with prayer requests and sacrificial gift. The envelopes are placed on an altar and then dramatically prayed over by the Bishop and various pastors. The gifts having been removed the prayer requests are taken to Israel to be prayed over and ceremonially burned on the Mount of Olives. This is viewed by some observers as motivational symbolism and others as a scam on duped followers.

The UCKG seeks to make itself available to outsiders and regular attenders by means of an almost round the clock availability. They seek to buy or lease sites that are contiguous with the public and unlike traditional

¹⁶ Recently surfing through the official websites of the UCKG in the UK, Brazil, Argentina and France all were looking at the life of Abraham and similar sermons and activities were being mounted in these diverse cultural settings.

¹⁷ Cox H. op. cit. p. 184

¹⁸ Although unable to interview leaders or to conduct any sort of scientific survey it was noticeable in conversations with those participating in meetings that I attended, the numbers who stated that they also attended other Black Pentecostal Churches or had previously attended them. A typical comment made by a Ghanaian lady was that the style was exactly the same as her (African Initiated Church) church in Ghana.

churches they style themselves as UCKG HelpCentres as a neutral or positive, almost secular sounding, presentation of themselves.

"Caio Fábio, referring to the UCKG, asserted that it is 'only a door. The UCKG does not have a door, it is a door. Its architecture is a door...wide open, greedy mouth, open and on the sidewalk'. "¹⁹

As with the rest of the global franchise of the UCKG the larger churches have four services a day at 7am, 10 am, 3 p.m. and 7.30 p.m. These are led by a Bishop or Pastor with the aid of assistants. The number of staff will vary with the services and attendance also varies with more in the evenings and especially Friday evening and weekends, the largest attendance being Sunday morning. Each day targets an area of felt need:

MONDAY - FINANCIAL PROBLEMS - debts, unemployment, problems in court, immigration, failing business, etc.

TUESDAY - ANOINTING WITH OIL FOR HEALING - If you are sick, incurable diseases, feeling pains, doctors cannot help... "I am the Lord that healeth thee"

WEDNESDAY - BIBLE STUDY & HOLY SPIRIT MEETING - Come and see the Word of God come to life and become relevant for you today, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

THURSDAY - MARRIAGE AND FAMILY PRAYER - Bring photographs, clothes, and names of your family to be prayed for.

FRIDAY - DELIVERANCE DAY - Strong prayer to break curses, destroy witchcraft, demon possession, bad luck, bad dreams all spiritual problems

SATURDAY

PRAYER FOR PROSPERITY - strong prayer for financial breakthrough

THERAPY OF LOVE - Let God help you find your ideal partner - 7pm

SUNDAY Strong prayer to the Holy Spirit - 10am (most important service)

- Miracles Evening - prayer for impossible cases - 4pm
- Meeting of the Holy Spirit - 7pm

That the church sees this as a strategic mission strategy is shown by the fact that it is followed internationally. It is consciously problem oriented, rather than the mainline church that is more geared to developing a sense of community. They concentrate on a few major themes that particularly impact on the lives of the poor in Third World countries.

3.5 From the Rainbow Theatre to a Rainbow Coalition

The success of the UCKG HelpCentres in London among the West African and African Caribbean communities would appear to be very close to locking them into these communities. Is there a possibility that this church, in mixed areas like Finsbury, could manage to create a sort of "Rainbow Coalition" of the poor and as such become a sort of bridge between the white and ethnic churches in Britain's inner cities? The answer to this seems to be that it is highly unlikely. An interesting comparison is the initial approach of the UCKG in the USA. The church started with services in English and promptly stagnated. Any approach to contextualisation would require a serious reading of the more materialistic and secular nature of the British cultural reality. This would entail major changes and for the denomination to use different strategies and probably take on different criteria for "success". At this time it seems likely that the UCKG will be perceived as a black afro-Caribbean church and restricted to ghetto areas of our major cities.

4. Some Conclusions:

4.1 What have we to learn?

The UCKG HelpCentre franchise offers us a new model of mission. They challenge our traditional thinking on a series of levels. Firstly their financial model of Christian entrepreneurship allows for flexibility of approach and ability to place adequately financed teams. They take the gospel into the public spaces with shopfront locations and high profile venues such as the Rainbow theatre.

The up side of applying the franchise model is that it takes very little effort in setting it up, leadership training is done in situ in a hands on way. The model is clear, objectives are clearly set out, and web pages and publications skills are part of the package. The down side of course is that this is not contextualised and as has resulted in the UK the group that has responded is one that shares their underlying cosmivision.

The availability is also a challenge though this is at the cost of community. Thus the church services make it available but this is seen in terms of "clients" rather than members and these "clients" see it as a place of

¹⁹ Shaull R. & Cesar W. op. cit. p.19

spiritual consumerism and the UCKG as the selling of their package. However, we look at that the meeting of people at the point of felt needs, the use of healing and exorcism and motivational symbolism is something that we could well consider in our approach to mission and doing church. Whereas mainline Protestantism reacting against the Roman Catholic background has a real poverty in terms of the symbolic and reduces ministry to 'The Word'. Classical Pentecostals have, by their high level of congregational participation with testimony, 'tongues' and 'prophecy', to some measure liberated or democratised the 'Word'. The UCKG have gone a step further by recuperating some Roman Catholic and Afro-Brazilian religious practices and creative attempts to contextualise their understanding of scripture. This has resulted in a subsequent breaking with the dependence on the Word and releasing the use of symbolic actions as a central part of the worship style. Some of this symbolism such as blessing water and food, the anointing of clothes, schoolbooks and photographs by the Bishops, are seen as a modern contextualisation of biblical actions. Common things are used as points of mediation between the believer and the divine. These seem to vary and some are more controversial than others. A common example is the distribution of a red rose for health and to ward off evil, white rose when dealing with sentimental issues and yellow rose for prosperity. The use of Holy oil and Holy salt are also used in Brazilian Spiritist practices.

4.2 Areas of concern

4.2.1 Accountability

The organisational structure of the church is in the hands of very few people and the majority has no knowledge of what is being done in their name. This has led to financial scandals, claims that senior church leaders have inappropriate lifestyles.

4.2.2 Motivational Symbolism or Magic Thinking

The very creative use of symbolism has led many to question some of their symbolic practices as mere "carry - over" from Macumba and Candomble practices (Developed from Spiritism, syncretistic Catholicism and West African religious rites brought by the slaves to Brazil). Before being welcomed into mainstream Christianity some of the more extreme practices need to be analysed and where necessary rejected by the UCKG as unhelpful and extra-biblical.

4.2.3 Prosperity Teaching and the Atonement

Another key area of dialogue would be around the core practices of the church in the area of deliverance, healing and prosperity and how this affects the UCKG teaching of the atonement. Bishop Macedo seems to lack any awareness of the "already - not yet" continuum. Healing and blessing is seen as a right and a lack of healing or prosperity implicitly to indicate an incomplete liberation or deliverance. This can be seen to call into question the finished work of Christ on the Cross. In this context biblical teaching on suffering also needs to be addressed, Jesus is also the Suffering Servant as well as the Cosmic Lord.

There is not really an option to engage creatively with the Neopentecostal movement or not. Present trends show that in less than a century the Pentecostal movement as a whole has grown geometrically and some 500 millions around the world would identify themselves with this form of Christianity. We must find ways of constructive engagement with such groups as the UCKG with a view to mutual enrichment and hopefully a more biblical and Christ-like face for the church in the coming decades.

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