AFRICAN "PENTECOSTALISM"
No 3 of Journal of Religion in Africa, 1998, Vol. 28, is, according to the editorial, consecrated to ‘African Pentecostalism’. Four authors discuss different aspects of it: Rosalind I.J. Hacket in Charismatic/ Pentecostal Appropriation of Media Technologies in Nigeria and Ghana, Ruth Marshall-Fratani in Mediating the Global and Local in Nigerian Pentecostalism, Birgit Meyer in ‘Make a Complete break with the Past’: Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostal Discourse and David Maxwell in ‘Delivered from the Spirit of Poverty?’ Pentecostalism, Prosperity and Modernity in Zimbabwe. The papers are presenting interesting facts and theories. Even if the four authors concentrate on different focus and different countries in their essays there are many similarities in the facts they present. I will not discuss all the papers in detail, but mainly relate to topics that concern the history of the Pentecostal Church in Burundi, with its roots in the Pentecostal Church in Sweden, the object of my own research. Finally I will raise a question that has repeatedly come to my mind while reading this issue, a question of scientific terminology. First of all I shall give a brief survey of the content of the four essays, one at a time and then compare some of the main points with my own research on Burundi. Much more could, of course, be said on these matters.

1a. Charismatic/ Pentecostal Appropriation of Media Technologies in Nigeria and Ghana
Rosalind IJ Hacket concentrates on religion and media. Her aim is to show how the “charismatic and pentecostal” movements in Ghana and Nigeria “are increasingly favouring electronic media as suitable sites for transmission of their teachings and erecting of their empires”. She argues that these developments result in the transformation of the religious landscape (p 258). A lot of importance is thus attributed to these ‘charismatic movements’, also in the political and cultural life of the two countries. The use of media is a tool of expansion. There are a number of different factors explaining the growth of the charismatic movements (p 260): the spirit-filled and empowering worship of the charismatic, the political situation in the countries (failed civilian governments, unpopular military regimes) and hard economic times, the gospel of prosperity, organisational skills and social networks. The charismatics want to be seen as ‘progressive’ and ‘modern’. On She describes ‘gospel of prosperity’, where “the ultimate icon of conspicuous salvation is the Mercedes Benz,” (p 264) and adds that not all the churches are subscribing to or openly celebrating this gospel. (From the context I am not sure if the word ‘churches’ here refers to the charismatic churches or all the churches in the area. She argues that there is not a Christian Church in Nigeria or Ghana that has not been affected by the revivalist trends of the last few decades.) That teaching is not part of the message in a traditional pentecostal church, even if there might be pentecostal churches influenced by it.

Hacket emphasises that the majority of the charismatic movements is locally instituted, while some of their leaders were formed in the US and still maintain affiliations with leading American evangelists. With extended viewing audiences and the enhancement of the electronic medium, evangelists with a powerful message and a ”good dose of charisma” may attract a much larger following, which might in part explain the development of ‘mega-church’ in both Ghana and Nigeria in recent years. The images and messages are not only consumed by thousands, they continue to be recycled and
marketed for personal use as videos and audiotapes. It is also important not to overlook the perceived ability of media to mediate and dispel power(s) (p 267).

As a final remark Hacket concludes that ‘the message and the media marry well for Africa’s charismatics and pentecostals, just as they do for their counterparts in Asia, Latin America, Europe, and North America.” (p272) Here Hacket is not only talking about ‘charismatics’ but about ‘pentecostals’ as well. Would that be true also for the Pentecostal Church in Burundi?

1b. The Pentecostal Church in Burundi and its use of modern media technologies
The Pentecostal Church in Burundi (Communauté des Eglises de Pentecôte au Burundi, CEPBu) was founded in 1935, by Swedish and Congolese missionarries. The latter ones were members of pentecostal congregations in the province of Kivu. The first congregations were all in the southern part of the country. No other pentecostal mission has been working in the country. Since independence in 1962 the Pentecostal Church has spread all over the country and is now the biggest protestant church with about 350,000 members. There was a split some years ago, when a small group formed its own Pentecostal Denomination. That was more due to political reasons than doctrinal ones. To what extent has CEPBu used mass media as a tool of expansion?

The mother church in Sweden has not been unfamiliar to the use of modern media technologies. In 1915 Filadelfiaförsamlingen in Stockholm, the leading pentecostal congregation in Sweden, decided to publish a weekly paper, Evangelii Härold. Besides concentrating on the doctrine of the new movement, it was to be an important link between the growing number of independent local churches. It was also to become the young movement’s voice of defence when criticised by the secular papers or by other Christian denominations. In November 1945 the first issue of a daily paper, Dagen, was published. It presented ordinary news at the same time, as it was the voice of the Pentecostal Church in questions of general matter in society, especially moral and ethic questions. In times of debate, it was used to voice the pentecostal view. An independent pentecostal radio was established in 1949, out of the reactions to a service in Filadelfiaförsamlingen. Stockholm, broadcast by the national radio, which was a state monopoly on the broadcasts up till 1979. During the service there was a thanksgiving because of a man having been healed from cancer. An animated debate followed in the daily papers. The question was whether it should be accepted in “such an enlightened time” that broadcasting spread a message about miraculous healing by God. That incident and others led up to the creation of the pentecostal radio station, IBRA. As it was forbidden to broadcast in Sweden, it sent on short wave from abroad. After 1960 it broadcast mainly via local radio stations in different mission countries.

In 1983 the Pentecostal Church started its own television production company, TV-Inter. Up to now, there have been no pentecostal televangelists in Sweden. TV-Inter focuses more on ordinary services and song programs. However, as in Nigeria, it is the Faith Movement -with its gospel of prosperity- and its leader Ulf Ekman who are favouring electronic media and, not the least, audiovideos and tapes.

The Pentecostal Mission, La Mission Libre Sudéoise (MLS) had been working not only in Burundi, but in Rwanda and the Kivu province in Congo as well. Before 1960 MLS treated the three areas as one mission field, using the colonial administrative language of
that area, Swahili, in all their work. From 1942 and onwards the journal Shahidi la Kweli (The Truth Witness) was published in Kivu – in Swahili – and was also distributed in Rwanda and Burundi. However, being written in Swahili, it was only understood by a minority in these countries, among the few who, at that time, had learnt to read.

After Independence Kirundi was the language to use, but it was not until 1970 that the Pentecostal Church published their own a magazine, called Ijwi rya Pentekote (The Voice of Pentecost). It is rather like Evangelii Härold with personal testimonies, sermons and news from the different congregations. CEPBu has not used radio emissions in evangelisation, nor television. Trans World Radio is sending from Bujumbura and there are Pentecostals among its staff, but there is no official co-operation. That is more due to a negative stand towards ecumenical co-operation than to a negative view of the radio media as such. PCAT, the Pentecostal Church in Tanzania, that is co-operating with the Swedish one, has formed their own TV - producers and is actually sending TV-programs in the urban areas, especially for children. Nothing similar has yet occurred in Burundi, where TV as such is not a much spread media.

What was very popular, from the second half of the 1970s, was to record Christian songs. During the services, you could almost always see someone holding his/ her tape recorder towards the choir. As far as I know it was just the songs that people recorded, not the predications, and then they played them, wherever it was possible.

Media has obviously not been an important tool in the evangelisation of the Pentecostal Church in Burundi. Neither are big crusades. When Doug Peterson talks about pentecostals in the two thirds world – in particular in Latin America - he writes: ‘City-wide crusades held in huge stadiums are often the prevailing stereotypes of pentecostal evangelism or portrayals of revivalists which discredit the attention of readers from the grassroots, individual dynamics of a movement… the vast majority of evangelism and growth, however, results from Bible studies … in the home of a church member.’ In Burundi the small chapels in the villages have played the same role as the home mentioned, the Bible studies most often conducted by a village evangelist.

2a. Mediating the Global and Local in Nigerian Pentecostalism
Ruth Marshall-Fratani takes her starting point in the ‘transnationalism’, the nation-state and the media and discusses first the new situation in the world, created these last decades before applying it to “Nigerian Pentecostalism”. One of the questions taken up is to which extent the current wave of Pentecostalism - in urban Nigeria - provides an example of the creation of subjects “whose individual and collective identities seem to have been formed in terms of a new type of negotiation between local and global, one in which the media has a privileged role. (p281) The other question is the way Pentecostalism positions itself vis-à-vis the Nigerian nation-state. I cannot discuss the first question as my own study is a historical one, but I will concentrate on the second.

2b. Relation to the state in Burundi
Discussing the relation to the Nigerian State, Marshall-Fratani shows that even though Pentecostalism hardly faces the real issues behind the workings of power, it nevertheless entails a fairly bold attack on the Nigerian State (p305). That is not the situation in Burundi. In the 1930s the Catholic Church was in practise the state church of the country. When the Belgian Governor had granted permission to the Swedish Pentecostal
missionaries to establish themselves in the country he got a letter of rebuke from the catholic Archbishop. The Swedes were well aware of the situation and underlined in letters that they were not interested in winning people by the help of secular power, they preferred to put there confidence in the Word of God. During the decades that have passed the situation has changed thoroughly (as it has in e.g. the Pentecostal Church in Brazil). Being the biggest Protestant Church in the country and responsible for a lot of social development projects, in particular schools (to a high degree financed by the governmental SIDA, the Swedish Development Aid Agency) it stands in quite another relation to the Government. However, contrary to the ‘charismatic’ churches in Ghana it does not comment on the actual situation in the country. It has always been the policy of the Swedish Pentecostal Mission ”not to get involved in politics”, even if these last years statements against the situation in Congo-Kinshasa, Burundi and Rwanda have been published.

3a. ‘Make a Complete break with the Past’: Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostal Discourse

In recent years the growth of the pentecostal churches in Ghana has been phenomenal. The aim of Birgit Meyer is not only to contribute to a better understanding of the popularity of “Pentecostalism” in Africa, but also of the relationship between religion, memory and modernity in a globalising world. The paper looks closely at how Pentecostalism seeks rupture from the past – at the same time being engaged in a dialectics of remembering and forgetting, which has helped to construct that past. The specific pentecostal attitude towards the past is placed in the context of postcolonial debates about the importance of the ‘African heritage’ to national culture.”(p318).

Meyer’s last section is called Pentecostalism, memory and modernity.

Meyer has made a case study of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana, founded after a split in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC). A pentecostally oriented prayer group within the EPC was opposed to the church leader’s attempt to introduce an African theology that would do justice to African culture and religion. The members of the prayer group eventually split away and formed the above-mentioned church. Meyer emphasises that the proponents of pentecostalisation regarded the local gods and spirits as really existing agents of Satan. They strove to exclude them, thereby placing themselves in a tradition of Africanisation “from below”, an important point to make.

4b. The break with the past in Burundi

The radical rupture with the past, which all the four authors mention, is also a typical feature of the Pentecostal Church in Burundi. Meyer is right in claiming that ”deliverance, which is conceptualised as a ‘spiritual’ fight between God and Satan and which aims at a person’s liberation from all forms of occultic bondage, is the feature which is most relevant to the discussion of the notion of rupture.” This is true also for the Pentecostal Church in Burundi, where the existence of spirits as really existing agents of Satan has always been accepted. They treat them as such by practising exorcism, i.e. the act of expelling evil Spirits by adjuration in the name of Jesus Christ. The pentecostal pastors do underline the necessity of a complete break with the past. One of my informants, a woman missionary, said that already in the forties, she found the African elders in the Church much too severe on certain behaviour, belonging to the African tradition. But they do not look upon ”the local god” in the same manner. Imana,
the God of the ancient Burundi, is the name used for God in the Burundian pentecostal churches.

4a. ‘Delivered from the Spirit of Poverty?’ Pentecostalism, Prosperity and Modernity in Zimbabwe

David Maxwell’s paper focuses on a particular version of the prosperity gospel propounded by the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God, Africa (ZAOGA) “a pentecostal movement that claims to be Zimbabwe’s largest church.”(p351). According to Maxwell’s opinion the movement’s leadership draws upon various American versions of the prosperity gospel to legitimate their excessive accumulation but its own dominant prosperity teachings have arisen from southern Africa sources and are shaped by Zimbabwean concerns. Having mentioned the argument of Paul Gifford that the influence of American bible belt literature and resources have made many southern African born-again Christians vulnerable to the agenda of the American New Religious right, Maxwell explains the prevalence of the doctrines, not in terms of right wing conspiracy, but as means of enabling pentecostals to do their best of rapid social change. (p351)

ZAOGA is a predominately urban movement. To be a ZAOGA member is to be urban and modern. It was founded in Salisbury by a group of young pentecostals, expelled from the South African derived Apostolic Faith mission in 1959 after a struggle with missionaries. The group joined South African Assemblies of God. After having been expelled once more they formed in 1967 their own organisation Assemblies of God, Africa (AOGA). In the 1970s its leader Ezekiel Guti studied in Dallas, USA. After Zimbabwean independence in 1980 the movement established itself in other African countries. In 1986 it planted the first of a number of churches in Britain. At that time the former egalitarian structure had been replaced by an authoritarian hierarchy and personality cult centred on Guti.

All though there are great similarities between the other Zimbabwean pentecostal churches and ZAOGA, in the latter the processes of economic and social transformation have been refined into two interrelated teachings, which are central to the movement’s identity, namely the doctrines of talents and of the Spirit of Poverty. The doctrine of talent teaches how to finance the expansion of the community by vending cheap foodstuffs and clothes. The doctrine of Spirit of Poverty explains the poverty of Africa and popular insecurities in Zimbabwe but gives also a remedy to it. The Spirit of Poverty comes from the ancestors and ZAOGA’s preachers demonise tradition with more effect than the older pentecostal missionaries did. This is part of the teachings of the prosperity gospel, first taught to the members of ZAOGA in 1985 by Myles Munroe, a black Bahamas-based teacher, and a graduate of Oral Roberts’ University. ZAOGA projects an image of material success, which classical pentecostal preaching never did.

In his conclusion Maxwell states that ZAOGA in many respects has become a victim of its own success. Nevertheless the doctrine Spirit of Poverty still has great appeal as an explanation for, and response to, misfortune and poverty.

4b. CEPBU is mainly a Rural Movement

In comparison with the movements presented in the actual issue, the Pentecostal Church in Burundi has always been, and to the greater part still is, a rural movement. It is only the two last decades that the congregations in Bujumbura and in Gitega have grown into
what they are today. However, the biggest congregation is still to be found on the
countryside, in the southern part, where in many villages the pentecostals constitute the
majority of the population.

Much of the Burundian tradition was also viewed entirely negative, even more so by the
Burundian pastors than by the Swedish missionaries, as shown earlier. I have never met
the Spirit of Poverty doctrine in my research.

5. The Definition of ‘Pentecostalism’
The question coming to my mind when reading the issue is: ‘Are they really discussing
Pentecostalism’? A common feature of the churches treated in the articles is the
preaching and practising of the ‘gospel of prosperity’ which is not true of classical
Pentecostalism. There are also other significant differences, noticed by the different
authors, giving me reasons to question the use of the term in this context. We will first
look into what the authors themselves say on the subject. To find a suitable term is not
easy. I have not found one, as is shown in this essay.

In three of the mentioned papers the term Pentecostals/ Pentecostalism is used all the
time even though the authors do notice differences in practice and in doctrine between
what they call the older and the new churches.

Hacket does have a paragraph, where she discusses definitions. She notices that the
debate goes on whether to use ‘Pentecostalism’ as an umbrella term or not. In Ghana,
the term ‘pentecostal’ refers to older churches (dating from the 1930s and often of
Western provenance), while ‘charismatic’ is applied to the newer (post 1970), locally
generated movements whose focus is healing, prosperity and experience. The author
points out that some Western scholars use ‘neo-pentecostal’ when referring to those
movements. The author herself prefers the term ‘charismatic’ to distinguish “this new
type of religious collectivity”, despite the fact it usually has been used to describe those
renewal movements within the mainline churches. Her reason for doing it is that as a
label it is gaining wider currency. But the term ”charismatic” refers to behaviour and
”pentecostal” to doctrine.

I wonder if it would not be better to use the term ‘Gospel of Prosperity Churches’. She
makes a clear distinction between the older ‘pentecostal’ churches and these new
movements and she has noticed a concern of the charismatics ones to distinguish
themselves from their pentecostal counterparts. However, she gives no definition of
what the term ‘pentecostal’ stands for. (Meyer tells us that in Ghana, pentecostal
churches, represented in the Pentecostal Council, increased with 43 % between 1987
and 1992. It would be interesting to know if what Packet calls ‘charismatic churches’,
do or do not belong to this council.) Most of the time Hacket uses the word
‘charismatic’ in her paper, but now and then charismatic and pentecostal appear
together, without any discussion of why they suddenly go together.

There are similarities between what Hacket terms pentecostal and charismatic churches.
She defines what distinguishes these ‘newbreed’ churches (p262). Among these
definitions you find commitment to a ‘full gospel’, Bible-centred, not forcibly, but
leaning toward literalist, religious orientation and that they distinguish between those
who are born again and those who are not. That could be applied to adherents of the
East Africa Revival in the 1930s, to Pentecostals and to other revival movements. Another similarity is what the author calls ‘well-organized communities.’ Doug Peterson states that ‘The strength of the /Pentecostal/ movement is achieved at the level of the local congregation.’ He looks upon the formation of congregations as one of the most characteristic features of the movement. (Transformation … p 19)

Why does Hackett then – rightly and in contrast to the other three authors– also in her terminology distinguish between the pentecostal churches and ‘this new type of religious collectivity.’? She says herself that focus of the new is healing, prosperity and experience.

Marshall-Fratani introduces the term ‘Pentecostalism’ (p 280) without any discussion of how to define it. Some lines further down (p 281) she quotes Rijk Van Dijk saying ‘The new charismatic type of Pentecostalism’, but she does not explain the significance of the expression. A little bit later (p282) on she discusses differences in doctrine between the ‘older’ churches – the already existing pentecostal churches – and the ‘new organisations. The older ones emphasise a doctrine of ‘holiness and antimaterialism’. The new ones ‘place themselves firmly in the ‘world’ and she adds: ‘The gospel of prosperity offers a doctrine of morally-controlled materialism, in which personal wealth and success is interpreted as the evidence of God’s blessing.’ My question is: Is it proper to use the same term for two movements that differ so much in fundamental doctrine?

Meyer explains in a footnote that by ‘pentecostal churches’ she refers ‘not only to internationally spread pentecostal churches of American or European origin … but to all churches in the pentecostal spectrum, including the so-called charismatic churches. In another passage (p320) she specifies that ‘charismatic’ stand for ‘a newer type of Pentecostalism recently emerged, especially in urban areas.’ But she sees no reason to distinguish between these and the older ones – in spite of noted differences- from the point of view of doctrine.(p321) According to her what all ‘pentecostal’ churches have in common is a particular set of religious ideas and practices, such as baptism in the Spirit, speaking in tongues, divine healing, and strong emphasis on personal prayers. Compared with Dayton she makes ‘speaking in tongues’ a mark on its own. On the foregoing page Meyer also added prosperity in this world as one of the reasons for people to join a pentecostal church.

According to classical pentecostal doctrine, prosperity is not implicit in the salvation. The majority of the first generation Pentecostals was poor and they stayed poor. As a consequence of a convert’s change of lifestyle, social mobility upward in society is usual, which is also pointed out in these essays. In the Pentecostal Church in Burundi this social mobility is also due to the fact that the Pentecostal Mission, as other missions, offered education up to university level. The former principal of the university of Bujumbura was the son of a pentecostal pastor.

Final remarks
What is important to compare is the content of the teachings in these ’new’ movements with what is taught in traditional Pentecostal churches and then ask the question if it is relevant to use the term at all in this new connection. It is also important to look into who the leading American evangelists are, with whom the charismatic churches in

As I have argued above, the gospel of prosperity is not part of classical pentecostal doctrine. Neither is the particular form of teaching, named Spirit of Poverty. To look upon Christ as “true doctor for body and soul” the Pentecostals have done from the very first. However, illness was not looked upon as demon possession, as has been the case within churches belonging to the Faith Movement/ Gospel of Prosperity Churches. The Swedish pentecostal missionaries as well as their Burundian counterparts accepted the local belief in spirit possession and offered liberation through prayer, what Meyer calls ‘Africanization from below’. That non-rationalistic attitude, in contrast to most of their western, non-pentecostal colleagues, is one of the reasons behind the tremendous growth of the Pentecostal Church in Burundi. But in traditional pentecostal preaching Christians are not supposed to be possessed by demons, a part of the teaching in the Faith Movement/ Gospel of Prosperity Churches and both Meyer and Maxwell talk about that possibility in the doctrine of the churches they are describing.

The great importance attached to experience is to a certain extent a common feature. However, in classical Pentecostalism the experience should always centre on Christ, not on the experience in itself. The early leaders of the Pentecostal Movement in Sweden were eager to experience the baptism in the Holy Spirit not because of the experience as such, but because of the felt need of strength in their daily struggle to live as Christians (P-A Sverker, lecture at Örebro Missionsskola, 1989).

In the first issue of the weekly paper Evangelii Härold the Swedish Pentecostal declared that the intention with the new paper was to proclaim the salvation message about cleansing from all evil, about the baptism in the Holy Ghost and the charismatic gifts, about Jesus as the healer, and about the judgement expecting the souls who reject Him. (Söderholm Den svenska pingströrelsen 1907 – 1927,II, 1928, p ). This corresponds well to what Donald W. Dayton writes in Theological Roots of Pentecostalism, where he shows that salvation, healing, baptism of the holy Spirit, and a second coming of Christ were fused by the pioneers within in the movement. From my research on the Swedish Pentecostal Church, I should like to add a strong concentration on the second person of Trinity, Jesus Christ.

The discussed differences are big enough to motivate the use of another term than ‘Pentecostalism’ or ’neo-pentcostalism’ to denote these new movements, developed the last decades. The term ”charismatic” should not be used either, for two reasons. First, it usually refers to a specific movement within the older mainline churches. Second, it refers not to the doctrine of the churches, but to their behaviour, i.e. another kind of classification. I defy researchers with a more profound knowledge of the subject (mine restricted to Sweden and Burundi) to find an appropriate term.

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