

## ***Radical Change in Zambia's Christian Ecumenism***

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*This account of religious change in Zambia discloses shifts in the ideas and practices of Christian unity since independence. It shows that state-backed appeals, at times repressive, under the slogan 'one nation, one church' gave way to a series of alternatives in institutional ecumenism, leading towards a challenge to the very nature of ecumenism, grassroots as well as institutional. The new stress is on individual choice and personal services, and yet membership in congregations persists – a complex, even contradictory, situation here conceptualised as 'multiple devotions'. The disclosure in this article calls into question conventional views of the importance of schism in churches and brings certain current tendencies – 'multiple devotions', 'charismatic transmission', 'mushrooming churches' – into focus in relation to wider, even global, religious movements, including the impact of neo-Pentecostalism and the striking new efflorescence of evangelical bodies self-labelled as 'Ministries International', in an imported style. The analysis suggests that in many of the 'Ministries International' there is a turn from church membership with fellowship in a solidary congregation to an individualistic patron–client relationship between pastor and believer. Each Ministry presupposes an asymmetrical relationship: one person ministers to another. Instead of a group of people coming together, a Ministry International offers services to whoever is interested, often on a casual basis; and, although without any drive for older forms of church unity or usual aspirations for past forms of grassroots ecumenism, the Ministries International are widely perceived to be a force for interdenominational tolerance.*

**Keywords:** ecumenism; schism; charismatics; neo-Pentecostals; Ministries International

### **Introduction**

Zambian Christians are re-creating grassroots ecumenism in radical forms. Innovative and surprising and yet hardly considered systematically in our literature, these forms, emerging in the past 20 years, constitute a significant challenge to much conventional wisdom about ecumenism as an institutional phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> This big shift is remarkable. In the past, certain social issues were at the very heart of efforts towards ecumenical developments, and theologians sought ecumenical ways forward by trying to solve historical differences, as if to foster, even on a remote horizon, the ideal of ultimately one Christian church. Instead, much of the new grassroots ecumenism emphasises shared spiritual experiences and holistic – including material – well-being as advocated by neo-Pentecostals.

Three interrelated tendencies dominate in this new grassroots ecumenism: multiple devotions (popularly called 'double memberships'), 'mushrooming churches', and widespread charismatic transmission. The present account conceptualises each of the dominant tendencies, situates their interrelation in Zambia and examines their locally controversial importance in tensions between grassroots ecumenism and institutional structures of ecumenism at higher levels, national or international. In-depth interviews with pastors and other Christians participating in multiple devotions are drawn upon in this account. With a

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<sup>1</sup> While a lecturer since 2011 at Justo Mwale University, Lusaka, Zambia, I carried out the research for this article, primarily in urban settings. All interviews for this article were conducted by the author. The interviews were informal and with colleagues, students, pastors, and church members whom I came to know reasonably well. In addition, I attended and observed a number of diverse churches and ministries.

brief critique of ongoing ecumenical debate, the focus turns to broader comparison for a fresh perspective on grassroots ecumenism in southern Africa and elsewhere.

Of the three dominant tendencies, 'multiple devotions' is the one that stands out most as a new departure. Zambian Christians themselves speak of 'double membership', when they remark on the way that people participate in different churches and ministries at once.<sup>2</sup> However, rarely does a person actually become a 'member' of different churches at the same time, nor do many people restrict their practice to two forms of worship. Hence, for clarity, I call this participation the tendency to 'multiple devotions'. The most common form of multiple devotions involves congregants of mainline churches who attend their own church on Sunday morning and visit neo-Pentecostal ministries in the afternoon.

The second tendency Zambians call 'mushrooming churches', a phrase that actually has a long resonance, at least since the 1920s, in southern African discourse about the proliferation of new churches. Currently, it labels the tendency for many new ministries of a neo-Pentecostal style to be founded so frequently that it seems some emerge almost every week. In Bauleni, a township of Lusaka, there were 21 different churches in 1990, and, by 2010, 82 denominations were counted, 53 of which were Pentecostal in nature, 35 of them Zambian-born churches.<sup>3</sup> 'Mushrooming' is an apt metaphor, since the new ministries are most often not the result of a doctrinal argument or bitter schism breaking a church apart. As Roman Catholic anthropologist Bernhard Udelhoven observes, 'Zambian pastors, who feel called by God to engage in the task of evangelisation in an original and personal way, are among the main actors in the process of starting new churches'.<sup>4</sup> The founders of the new ministries see a niche, a different way of presenting the gospel, and they generally refuse to accept members from their previous congregation, at least at first. The name of the newly formed devotional settings generally ends with the phrase 'Ministries International', a label that comes originally from American churches. Instead of portraying themselves as a local community of worshippers, the ministries present themselves as service providers who offer their ministries to whoever in the world wants to obtain them. It is sometimes not even possible to become a 'member' of such a 'mushrooming Ministry International'.

My usage of 'charismatic transmission' for the third tendency is meant to identify the wide spread of charismatic ideas and practices among Zambian Christians of very different affiliations. Zambian theologian Jonathan Kangwa of the United Church of Zambia (UCZ) reports the early beginning of this tendency. He observes, '[i]n the late 1970s, some mainline churches such as the Roman Catholic Church and the UCZ began to adopt a Pentecostal and charismatic way of worship, including speaking in tongues and shouting' and, '[i]n the 1990s mainline churches like the UCZ began to accommodate Pentecostal and charismatic worship'.<sup>5</sup> After a substantial breakaway of Pentecostal-like believers, the UCZ changed its own worship in 1999, and a similar process took place in the country's second-largest Protestant church, the Reformed Church in Zambia, in 2008 as well.<sup>6</sup>

So far, my account has introduced the current dominant tendencies while presenting only briefly certain earlier major shifts in the ideals and practices of ecumenism. In order to contextualise these tendencies and highlight their impact, I turn now to illuminate how some of the prior shifts established the setting for the new tendencies and provided the background for their profound significance. Integral to my account is the view that the shifts in Zambian

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2 On 'dual membership', see J. Kangwa, 'Pentecostalisation of Mainline Churches in Africa: The Case of The United Church of Zambia', *Expository Times*, 127, 12 (2016), pp. 573–84.

3 See B. Udelhoven, 'The Changing Face of Christianity in Zambia: New Churches of Bauleni Compound', *FENZA Documents*, May 2010, pp. 1–21.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

5 Kangwa, 'Pentecostalisation', p. 7.

6 See L.R.K. Soko, 'Pentecostalism and Schisms in the Reformed Church in Zambia 1996–2001' (PhD thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 2010).

ecumenism are distinctive and yet part of a stream of broader shifts. Of these, some have been deliberately designed as global policies by eminent theologians for local implementation. Whereas relatively little has been documented about such local implementation, the fact that the global movement of institutional ecumenism has gone through different phases is well-known. For example, C-S. Song, the South Korean president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), remarked in 2005 at a major conference in Ghana: ‘[t]he “ecumenical” agenda defined by the churches in the West fifty years ago is no longer the “ecumenical” agenda of the churches in the rest of the world today. The “ecumenical” agenda, concerns and issues for the churches and Christians from the ends of the earth, have changed’.<sup>7</sup>

### **Spiritual Fellowship, Church and State Agendas: Ecumenical Change**

In a recent research project on ecumenicity in South Africa, Ernst Conradie, a theologian based at the University of Western Cape, concludes that ‘there is a tension between grassroots ecumenical fellowship and appropriate ecumenical structures at a national level’.<sup>8</sup> He observes that despite the fact that ‘lay Christians seem to have no problem in joining hands in prayer groups, marches, funerals, Bible study groups [...] by contrast, larger ecumenical structures are, to put it simply, “under review”’.<sup>9</sup> Conradie himself considers ‘the most serious challenge is to bridge the divide between mainline churches, AICs [African Independent Churches] and Pentecostal Churches’.<sup>10</sup> However, my own argument is that this appears to be true, at least in present-day Zambia, only if we focus on the institutional level. At the grassroots level, these divisions are already bridged, so much so that ‘multiple devotions’ and ‘mushrooming Ministries International’ have created a situation beyond ecumenism in the traditional sense.

Rather than the top-down approach of theologians solving doctrinal issues, or of church mother bodies advocating social justice, there has emerged a conversation between Christians from different denominations, and it proceeds creatively at the grassroots level. Instead of promoting institutional ecumenism, the currently dominant tendencies reinforce a more basic ecumenical feeling: ‘we are just Christians’.

In the 1960s, the ecumenical agenda was about solving differences in doctrine: can the historical differences between, for example, Lutheran and Roman Catholic theology be reconciled? Enthusiastic theologians from both sides came up with documents to which they could both agree. They hoped that this would advance understanding between the different churches, in the end perhaps even lead to a reunification. However, solving historical disagreements turned out to be not as influential as these ecumenical enthusiasts were hoping. Ordinary churchgoers seemed to care very little about these theoretical solutions of problems that they did not regard as their own, and fellow theologians were suspicious that agreements on doctrine may sometimes conceal deeper fundamental differences. Ordinary believers did not see the relevance, and theologians regarded the documents as little more than clever ways of hiding the true differences.

Such institutional ecumenism was the dominant form of ecumenism in Zambia in the 1960s as well. This can be seen clearly in the formation of the UCZ on 16 January 1965. After negotiations with many more mainline denominations in Zambia, four different Protestant churches finally joined together to form this new church. On the website of the UCZ, the

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<sup>7</sup> In O.P. Mateus, *The World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Modern Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva, WARC, 2005), p. 123.

<sup>8</sup> E.M. Conradie, ‘Notions and Forms of Ecumenicity: Some South African Perspectives’, in E.M. Conradie (ed.), *South African Perspectives on Notions and Forms of Ecumenicity* (Stellenbosch, Sun Press, 2013), p. 67.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

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

motivation behind the founding of the Church is traced both to biblical calls for unity and to the political ambiance of the era: '[t]he political liberation of Zambia contributed to the urgency the union of the Churches echoing the slogan of "One Zambia, One Nation" coined by the first Republican President, Dr Kenneth David Kaunda'.<sup>11</sup> UCZ lecturer Jonathan Kangwa goes even further, claiming that church unity in Zambia was 'obviously the result of political machinations by President Kenneth Kaunda and his United National Independence Party ... aiming for the creation of a one-party state'.<sup>12</sup> One new, united nation was seen as needing to have one new, united church, and although in the end only four of the numerous mission churches joined, the Church remains a strong example of what ecumenism can be: becoming one church.

### **Re-Envisaging Ecumenical Ideals and Practices**

In the 1980s, when Kaunda's regime was struggling to survive, there was also a shift in what ecumenically engaged believers tried to do. Disappointed in the effects of overcoming historical differences in theology, the goal changed now to working together in common struggles: for social justice, being a voice for the voiceless, helping the marginalised and stigmatised, and so forth. Austin Cheyeka, a Zambian scholar of religion, observes that 'Zambian Christianity is always spoken of in terms of three "mother bodies"', which 'have represented ordinary Christians in socio-political-economic matters of the country'.<sup>13</sup> In the transformation of Zambia to a multi-party state, Cheyeka notes, the '[c]hurches in Zambia like elsewhere in Africa played the role of "mid-wives" of multiparty politics'.<sup>14</sup> In the past, the political involvement of the churches went even further: '[i]n July 1991 the churches' leaders prevented a Constitutional crisis'.<sup>15</sup> In the 1960s, the unified state tried to unify the many different churches; in the 1990s, the churches, not unified but co-operating, helped to transform the state towards greater pluralism, allowing unity in diversity as well taking the form of a multi-party state. Among believers, the idea of ecumenism as that of becoming one church had shifted: it had come to mean working together in the mother bodies on social, economic and political matters. The church mother bodies in Zambia are still working along those lines.

This particular direction in ecumenism, however, is not the new one that WARC president Song recognised. The concerns and issues on the ecumenical agenda have changed, says Song, 'and for this we, the ecumenically committed mainline churches, have to be thankful to the charismatic movements that continue to arouse passion and exert influence in most parts of the world'. They are the ones who determine and discern 'the "ecumenical" agenda, concerns and issues of most Christians today'.<sup>16</sup> Social issues do not seem to be in the forefront of ecumenical developments, and solving historical doctrinal differences also does not seem to hold centre stage; rather, the concern that brings different Christian believers together is about spiritual experiences and holistic – including material – well-being, as advocated by neo-Pentecostals.

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11 United Church of Zambia Synod, 'UCZ History', available at <http://uczsynod.org/about/ucz-history>, retrieved 29 November 2016.

12 Kangwa, 'Pentecostalisation', p. 3.

13 A.M. Cheyeka, *Church, State and Political Ethics in a Post-Colonial State: The Case of Zambia* (Zomba, Kachere, 2008), p. 27.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 58.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 76.

16 C. Song, 'From the Ends of the Earth', presidential address to the 2004 WARC General Council; in Mateus, *The World Alliance*, p. 124.

### **African Distinctiveness, Historical Fellowship**

This latter point seems fitting especially for churches outside Europe, since, in an important sense, the history of many Christian doctrinal differences is not their history. 'African Christianity will evolve new ways and means of ecumenical interactions', foresees the theologian J.K. Mugambi, 'bypassing the Europe-dominated norms that have predominated during the twentieth century'.<sup>17</sup> In the 1920s, one observer of the Copperbelt in Zambia wrote: '[s]ome of the keener men were already acting as evangelists, cycling round from town to town to conduct services. As they discovered one another they found that their old denominational labels meant hardly anything at all. They were just Christians'.<sup>18</sup> D. M'Passou, who notes this observation, comments: '[t]o these Africans the denominational labels were historical accidents in which they found themselves involved in [*sic*] without understanding them'.<sup>19</sup> They were just Christians. In good measure, that is what I find to be a very powerful sentiment widespread in today's Zambia. While almost a century has sedimented traces of history upon the old denominational labels, the rise of Pentecostalism seems to have reinforced the feeling that 'we are just Christians'. People seem to change churches regularly, new churches and ministries start every day, and nobody seems to find it worrying. That the church ought to be one does not seem to be the first idea that occurs to people. It is as if we are all just Christians, whether we go to this church or that, or start one of our own. Such grassroots ecumenism means recognising one another as fellow Christians across denominational lines, so much so that the church unification in the 1960s has now, somewhat paradoxically, been called 'anti-ecumenical', since 'if there is only one church, there are no churches left to work together'.<sup>20</sup> Ecumenism had come to mean the co-operation of different denominations. A panel of mainline church leaders explained that, in their view: 'ecumenism is co-existence with other denominations without necessarily losing one's identity. We all belong to the same body of Christ despite having different gifts. There is only one church and that is the body of Christ'.<sup>21</sup> The ideal of ecumenism is no longer the same as the ideal of becoming one church: acknowledging one another to be part of the one body of Christ seems to be enough.

### **Charismatic Renewal and Institutional Ecumenism**

For much of the 20th century, Pentecostalism has been seen as an anti-ecumenical movement, though it was not originally, during a great revival in its early emergence. Recently, influential Pentecostal theologians and academics in the USA, such as Amos Yong, director of the Fuller Theological Seminary's Center for Missiological Research, have sought to restore the original ecumenical perspective. Yong comments on 'Neopentecostal Ecumenism' and observes, '[m]ore recently the globalization of the charismatic renewal has given further impetus to the idea of pentecostalism as an ecumenical movement'.<sup>22</sup> Invoking 'the uniting power of the ecumenical tradition of pentecostalism', Yong argues, '[t]he charismatic explosion in the mainline churches also opened the door for further pentecostal participation in formal ecumenical activities.... As pentecostals have gotten to know nonpentecostals in a deeper way in these joint efforts, they have come to appreciate the diversity present in the

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17 J.N.K. Mugambi, 'Ecumenism in African Christianity', in E.K. Bongmba (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Christianity in Africa* (New York, Routledge, 2016), p. 250.

18 In D. M'Passou, *Mindolo: A Story of the Ecumenical Movement in Africa* (Lusaka, Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation, 1983), p. 2.

19 *Ibid.*

20 Student for a Bachelor's degree in Theology at Justo Mwale University, Lusaka, Zambia, in an interview with author, Lusaka, 7–11 November 2016.

21 Panel at the Council of Churches in Zambia, 21 February 2014, Lusaka.

22 A. Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out On All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2005), pp. 180–81.

body of Christ'.<sup>23</sup> Zambian Pentecostals are aware that the appreciation comes from both sides, also from mainline Christians towards Pentecostals. 'Rejection gave way to the spirit of ecumenism which later gave way to acceptance of Pentecostals as a genuine Christian movement, unique and complete in its own right'.<sup>24</sup> Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals have begun to acknowledge one another, so much so that Yong concludes: 'Pentecostals have always been ecumenical even though most of us have not realized this before'.<sup>25</sup> Yong campaigns internationally for inter-faith dialogue and a Pentecostalism that supports rather than is hostile to ecumenism.

Yong's campaign has leading Pentecostal advocates in southern Africa also, of course. In harmony with Yong, the Malawian theologian and religious studies scholar Rhodian Munyenyembe suggests: '[t]he fact that one can accept fellow Christians from other denominations and be in a position to fellowship with them while respecting their differences is a good way of showing Christian unity without demanding uniformity. This is an ecumenism of unity in diversity'.<sup>26</sup> Munyenyembe claims that the underlying force is the transmission of charismatic spirituality.

When people have been truly touched by the Holy Spirit, it is not difficult to work together with different denominational backgrounds. It is amazing how people with Charismatic spirituality can unite and work together as Christians irrespective of their denominational affiliations. This means that the Charismatic movement has a strong uniting force among Christians.<sup>27</sup>

Charismatic Pentecostals are, in Munyenyembe's view, in the lead ecumenically against some anti-ecumenical opposition: '[u]nlike churches such as the Seventh-day Adventists, Charismatic churches are very willing to associate with many churches. This makes the Charismatic movement very encouraging for those that cry for ecumenism'.<sup>28</sup>

### **Ecumenical Spirituality, Revisiting the Idea of a Church**

Given the ecumenical importance of a broader campaign about shared spirituality among contemporary Pentecostal theologians, a caveat is in order. This is essential lest my account be taken to imply that the three dominant tendencies in grassroots ecumenism no longer allow any room at all for Zambian Christians to hope for or foster, even on a remote horizon, the ideal of ultimately one body of Christians – in this sense, one Christian church. This ideal still matters to young Zambian Christians, as my interviews document. For example, in one interview in Lusaka in May 2015, a Reformed theology student expressed his respect for this ideal by defining ecumenism as 'different denominations co-existing and worshipping together as members of the one body of Christ'. He explained that 'each denomination should aim at proclaiming the gospel so that people should come to Christ, the responsibility of choosing a church to go to belongs to the people themselves'. For him, mushrooming churches or Ministries International were not really a problem. Although he certainly did not regard this phenomenon to be a part of his responsibility as a future church leader, he disapproved of 'dual membership'. That was 'because it brings confusion: it is not clearly known where one belongs'. But he would encourage co-operation between different denominations. In his preaching in such a context, he would 'not touch on the doctrines

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 181–2.

<sup>24</sup> M.K. Banja, *Faith Of Many Colours: Reflection On Pentecostal and Charismatic Challenges in Zambia* (Ndola, Mission, 2009), p. 82; Banja refers here to a personal communication with someone called Sakala in 2008.

<sup>25</sup> Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out*, p. 183.

<sup>26</sup> R.G. Munyenyembe, *Christianity and Socio-Cultural Issues: The Charismatic Movement and Contextualization in Malawi* (Zomba, Kachere, 2011), pp. 110–11.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

because we differ on them, and it is good to come together as different denominations and fellowship'. He does accept the freedom and responsibility of believers to choose the church or ministry of their liking. This may not sound controversial, but it changes the meaning of church, ministry and ecumenism, when the church or ministry is seen as chosen by believers instead of consisting in its believers.

One of the pastors of a new Ministry International claims that the designations 'church' and 'ministry' can be used interchangeably, 'A ministry can operate without necessarily having a congregation, and a church can exist apart from a ministry. The two are both necessary, they must complement each other'.<sup>29</sup> A church consists in the believers congregating together, whereas a ministry focuses on the service delivered and consists of the pastor and his or her team. Even future leaders in a traditional mainline church remarked, 'a church must be seen as a ministry which offers services to everyone who is interested'; and 'a church is like a shop because there I can express my desires to seek God's guidance and hear him speak to me through the sermon, and where he addresses my needs'.<sup>30</sup> The new Ministries International change the idea of what a church is: no longer a group of people, but a strong leader who, in a business-like manner, offers spiritual services to believers.<sup>31</sup> The mushrooming Ministries International not only multiply the number of denominations, they also change the character of Christian denominations in general, and this changes what is seen as ecumenism at grassroots level.

One pastor of a Ministry International tells that her sister founded another Ministry International. She explains: 'we pray together, we consult each other, but we cannot be one ministry: she does not believe in congregations, she helps women and children, she believes in supporting pastors, whereas God has put me in a congregation, gave it to me to open churches'.<sup>32</sup> The two sisters can never join together in one ministry, but this is not felt as a problem, it is not considered to be threatening the unity of the church: 'it is just one church; there are different names but it is just one body for those who teach the truth'.<sup>33</sup> Denominations are still there, but the church is acknowledged to exist beyond denominational boundaries.

### **Crossovers and Schisms: Eclectic Flow, Multiplying Difference**

Given the increasing interaction of the three dominant tendencies, the impact on the very nature of churches has been considerable. The boundaries between different churches have become fluid: both people and practices readily cross over from church to church, or, rather, ministry to ministry. In tandem with this eclectic flow, differences within churches multiply. For example, whereas in the past no Reformed congregants practised anointing, some now do; now there are different kinds of Reformed congregants. In the past, ecumenism was identified with the project of building bridges across well-defined church boundaries and differences, without congregants losing their distinct identities. In the past, also, ecumenism was primarily directed by the top-down approach of theologians solving doctrinal issues, or of church mother bodies advocating social justice. Now, more directly, congregants recognise fellow Christians as believers who belong to different churches or ministries. The three currently dominant tendencies – multiple devotions, mushrooming churches and charismatic transference – seem to stimulate conversation between Christians from different denominations at the grassroots level.

29 Interview, Lusaka, 12 June 2015.

30 Interviews, Lusaka, 7–11 November 2016.

31 A full discussion, taking account of gender differences in leadership, is beyond the scope of this article. For an illuminating account of a new church founded and led by an inspiring woman, see F. Klaitz, *Death in a Church of Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2010).

32 Interview, Lusaka, 23 October 2015.

33 Interview, Lusaka, 23 October 2015.

### Schism: Neo-Pentecostals and Ministries International

This argument about cross-overs and ecumenical conversation between Christians of different denominations might seem problematic. The reason is the overwhelming stress on schism in much literature on new churches, and Pentecostals above all. And, at least obviously, schism seems to be a bad thing, or not good for grassroots ecumenism. In this vein, for example, the historian of Pentecostalism V.M. Kärkkäinen asserts: ‘the Pentecostal–Charismatic churches’ life has been an experience of endless divisions and splits; furthermore, Pentecostals and Charismatics have caused a number of divisions in relation to other churches’.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, the anthropologist of religion Birgit Meyer offers this generality for Africa, ‘[f]ission seems to be intrinsic to Pentecostalism and hence a broad spectrum of PCCs [Pentecostal Christian Church] with differences in doctrinal emphasis and style exists throughout Africa’.<sup>35</sup> The historian Allan Anderson reiterates the same opinion of schism: ‘[t]he recent history of Pentecostalism is littered with “revival” movements causing schisms that have become its defining feature’.<sup>36</sup>

The underlying assumption, conveyed in words such as ‘littered’, would seem to be so divisive and obviously subversive of Christian amity as to be well beyond anything conceivably ecumenical. But is that negative perception actually true now? Are there different kinds of schism, with different implications for grassroots ecumenism?<sup>37</sup>

Similar questions worry Zambians themselves. Madalitso Banja, a Zambian Pentecostal leader, laments: ‘[s]plits are a big and serious problem in PCC circles. Sadly church divisions these days are accompanied by a lot of finger pointing, quarrelling and so on and there is absolute need for people to be educated on how to handle conflicts’.<sup>38</sup> He warns: ‘[n]o church or ministry must be established out of the consideration for monetary gain, satisfaction of personal ego or any other egocentric consideration. Everybody must do everything within their power to avoid breakaways’.<sup>39</sup>

Most of the many denominations that have come to Africa trace their history to a schism at some point. These schisms are often construed by the parties involved as originally the result of disagreements about doctrine. If, in the long-term history of Christianity in Africa itself, doctrine does not play the most central role, what is behind these African schisms? Often, but not always, in the perception of the Pentecostals or charismatics involved, the cause is indeed seen less in doctrine and more in the person of the leader and in conflicts over leadership or personal benefit. Nevertheless, Austin Cheyeka discerns in schism more of a peaceful change: ‘[m]embership remains in a fluid state, but leadership wrangles are not too common in these [charismatic] churches. What is common is people leaving one Charismatic church to join another. Sometimes members of a church may quietly leave one church in order to go and start their own “independent” church’.<sup>40</sup> The founders have different ideas about worship and quietly set up their own ministry without causing a row with their old ministry. Banja acknowledges this practice as well, but he judges it to be not much better than quarrelsome separation. ‘The motivation for many splits is self-centredness. The motivation lies in the freedom to do what one wants without hindrance from anyone ... the lack of a

34 V-M. Kärkkäinen, ‘The Church as the Fellowship of Persons: An Emerging Pentecostal Ecclesiology of Koinonia’, *PentecoStudies*, 6, 1 (2007), p. 7.

35 B. Meyer, ‘Christianity in Africa: From African Independent to Pentecostal–Charismatic Churches’, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 33 (2004), p. 453.

36 A. Anderson, ‘Foreword’, in J.K. Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context* (Eugene, Wipf and Stock, 2013), p. xii.

37 See also O. Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 62, 83, 101.

38 Banja, *Faith of Many Colours*, p. 64.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 80.

40 Cheyeka, *Church, State and Political Ethics*, pp. 27, 41.



supervising authority is a particular incentive for a pastor to go independent'.<sup>41</sup> But, according to Banja, schisms are not necessarily bad, as long as one aims at the 'well being of the larger church. It must be acknowledged that even through church splits the work of God has been multiplied'.<sup>42</sup>

Seen against the well-established process of schism in Pentecostal churches, I suggest that, for our interest in grassroots ecumenism, we need to take into account a significant difference in the schismatic process in the new Ministries International in Zambia. In this newly emerging process, schisms may be accompanied by arguments and disagreements, but in general most new Ministries International in Zambia seem to develop slowly and without much quarrelling. One leader of a new Ministry International explains: 'yes, I am in ministry, but originally it was not intended to be a church as it is today, it was not even intended to be a ministry'.<sup>43</sup> She wanted to help street children and started to give them a bed, bath and food for a few days; other people joined, and they started to have a bible-study group together as well. More and more people joined. At first she hired other pastors to lead the bible studies, but then one of them told her, 'you better start doing it yourself', which she later interpreted as a calling to found her own ministry. Another pastor of a Ministry International had been in the leadership of a mainline church, but felt limited by his co-leaders in exploring different forms of worship, so he started his own ministry on the side, emphasising that he did not accept members coming from his mainline church, to avoid conflict.<sup>44</sup> Yet another pastor of a Ministry International explained that, while working abroad on another job, he learned to do ministry as well. Back in Zambia, his Pentecostal church did not allow him to proceed in that way, so he started his own ministry.<sup>45</sup> The leader of an interdenominational fellowship – and thus not (yet) a ministry – tells how he and a friend started to sing together regularly on Sunday evenings, how neighbours asked to join and, over time, more and more people came.<sup>46</sup> Many so-called schisms seem to happen quite accidentally and without people paying much attention to it – whether there is a ministry more or less does not seem to matter much.

Another leader of a Ministry International explains: 'sometimes somebody receives a pastoral calling, but the way he approaches it is different from the church where he is – and, well, you cannot ask the founder of a ministry to change his ways, so then God must be genuinely calling this other person to start on his own'.<sup>47</sup> And still another ministry's leader points out the evangelistic value of mushrooming Ministries International: 'the people who are attracted to my ministry might otherwise not have gone to church at all; and the same goes for my neighbour'.<sup>48</sup> According to many Zambians, having more different churches leads to more Christians, since everyone has his or her own taste in ministry. Several of my informants expressed these very positive views of mushrooming churches: 'it is good that there are many churches, because then we can reach out more; it is evangelism through decentralisation'. 'People who are not satisfied with my church will join the church of my neighbour'. 'Everyone has his or her own tastes and preferences for a particular church. This is evident because every church has members'.<sup>49</sup> My research shows that, even without a dogmatic confrontation, new ministries arise when someone with pastoral aspirations has his or her own distinctive ideas about worship or ministry. The focus is on the pastor, and believers choose to

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41 Banja, *Faith of Many Colours*, p. 63.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 64.

43 Interview Lusaka, 23 October 2015.

44 Interview Lusaka, 12 June 2015.

45 Interview Mpika, 16 June 2015.

46 Interview Lusaka, 7–11 November 2016.

47 Interview Lusaka, 12 June 2015.

48 Interview Mpika, 16 June 2015.

49 Interviews Lusaka, 7–11 November 2016.

participate in the services of the ministry of their liking. ‘Ministry’ conveys this idea that one person offers a service to someone else.

More broadly, my evidence on a shift from churches to ministries in Zambia supports this view of the Ghanaian Pentecostal scholar Asamoah-Gyadu:

[c]ontemporary Pentecostalism tends to emphasize ... particular graces in which the members minister to communities of believers.... This characteristic explains why the movement is popularly designated Charismatic Ministries (CMs). In principle, ministry is defined by gifts, and therefore in terms of ecclesiology, contemporary Pentecostals tend to be somewhat more lay oriented than the hierarchical priesthoods of the older denominations.<sup>50</sup>

Like many other scholars of neo-Pentecostalism, Asamoah-Gyadu praises its grassroots orientation for being somewhat more popular, if not quite egalitarian: neo-Pentecostalism acknowledges the priesthood of all believers. Admittedly, neo-Pentecostal pastors do not derive their leading position from formal study or institutional authority. However, neo-Pentecostal ministry is more vertical in structure than the traditional congregation. One person ministers to another, instead of two people joining in worship on a basis of equality. Zambian Pentecostal Banja complains, ‘[t]he church has become a loose collection of people who share similar beliefs instead of a closely knit family that cares one for the other’.<sup>51</sup> This looseness extends, according to Banja, to a shortcoming in mutual responsibility: ‘[c]hurch members must learn that it is not the duty of the pastor alone to extend fellowship to the members but that it is their individual and corporate responsibility as well to minister to one another’.<sup>52</sup> It is as if there is a shift not only from church to ministry but a subversive turn from membership with fellowship in a solidary congregation to an individualistic patron–client relationship between pastor and believer. Ministry presupposes asymmetrical relationships: one person ministers to another. Instead of a group of people coming together, a Ministry International offers services to whoever is interested. These services range from spiritual experiences to holistic – including material – well-being as advocated by neo-Pentecostals: believers are ‘in search of health and wealth’, – this is the title of even a mainline Reformed reflection on such new tendencies in the Zambian context.<sup>53</sup>

The pastors in the mushrooming Ministries International place themselves clearly above the believers attending their services. For Malawi, Munyenyembe observes that ‘[d]ue to the sense of power that accompanies famous Charismatic ministers it often happens that a personality cult develops around a certain Charismatic leader or leaders as if they have special rights to speak and act on behalf of God’.<sup>54</sup> Munyenyembe gives this example of a claim to divine and unquestionable authority, ‘Pastor Mtuwa argued that his understanding of church administration was that no one is entitled to question the pastor’.<sup>55</sup> The new ministries are fully controlled by their pastors. Some West African scholars of Pentecostalism perceive cultural continuity in this elevation of the pastor: it is claimed to be a reinvention of the traditional ‘Big Man’ from the indigenous African society. Kalu observes, ‘[a]s God was praised, so was His visible viceroy on earth. The image and idiom of the pastor as a superhero was derived and translated from the indigenous language and perception of the hero as someone who was chosen and anointed by the gods’. Similarly, Nimi Wariboko gives a cynical-sounding description of the leaders of the mushrooming Ministries International: ‘[t]he institution is often embodied in a single person: the pastor, president, or governor.

50 Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity*, p. 60.

51 Banja, *Faith of Many Colours*, p. 56.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

53 See H. Kroesbergen (ed.), *In Search of Health and Wealth; The Prosperity Gospel in African, Reformed Perspective* (Eugene, Wipf and Stock, 2014).

54 Munyenyembe, *Christianity and Socio-Cultural Issues*, p. 129.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 129.

Leaders are often characterized by vulgar, exuberant, exaggerated displays of power to “absorb” the institution they lead into themselves and to create the maximum distance between them and the governed.<sup>56</sup> Or it is held to reflect the resilience of traditional faith in magical powers and prophecy. Asamoah-Gyadu contends, ‘[a]nointing theology has caught on in African pneumatic Christianity because it fits into the traditional perception of religion as a source of power and of religious functionaries as people who must be effective in delivering such power for solving life’s debilitating problems’, and, ‘[i]t is believed that powerful anointing may be imparted through the touch of one who possesses the anointing in extraordinary measure’. In the same vein, Paul Gifford describes the role of Nigerian pastor Oyedepo in the Winner’s Chapel, which has many branches in southern Africa as well: ‘Oyedepo is not just a teacher and exemplar. He is the quintessential prophet, claiming crucial significance in the victorious living of his followers. His ministry actually brings this about’.<sup>57</sup> However, I recorded no remarks from my own informants in clear support of these views.<sup>58</sup> But against the contention that, as a rule, the ministries are egalitarian, I would argue that there is a top-down order in most new ministries not only in organisational structure but also in what the ministry has on offer. The ministry basically is an outlet to spread the particular anointing capacity given to its pastor.

In line with this top-down order, the nature of many new ministries appears – and not only to their Zambian critics – more like a shop or a business than a traditional church. Similar observations are familiar for mega-churches elsewhere.<sup>59</sup> Banja asserts for Zambian Pentecostals, ‘[s]ome churches are being run like secular companies’.<sup>60</sup> If traditional mainline churches seem, sometimes, to be more like social clubs where believers meet like-minded people, mushrooming Ministries International appear, at least to their critics, as if they are shops where believers go to get things for their spirituality. Believers use whichever service they need at a particular time: hence their multiple devotions.

The mushrooming of Ministries International creates a situation in which an organisational union of churches becomes more and more an illusion. Negotiations for a formal unity of the 21 churches in the Bauleni township in 1990 would have been very difficult; trying to unite the 82 churches in 2010 seemed nearly impossible. Working together on social, economic or political issues becomes more and more complex as well. However, we do not necessarily need to conclude that the new situation is anti-ecumenical. Rather, grassroots ecumenism now means something other than it did in the past.

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56 Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, p. 114; N. Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism* (Rochester, University of Rochester Press, 2014), p. 284.

57 Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity*, pp. 143, 141; P. Gifford, ‘Healing in African Pentecostalism: The “Victorious Living” of David Oyedepo’, in C.G. Brown (ed.), *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 260.

58 Of course, as many southern African scholars agree, the prophetic figure has remained hugely popular in southern African religion from before the arrival of Christianity. ‘As many individuals struggle’, Ezra Chitando reports, ‘they seek the services of prophets to empower them to cope with the challenges. Others seek the services of prophets in the hope that they can improve their employment opportunities’ (E. Chitando, ‘African Initiated Christianity in Southern Africa’, in Bongmba (ed.), *Routledge Companion*, pp. 290–91). See also R. Werbner, *Holy Hustlers, Schism and Prophecy: Apostolic Reformation in Botswana* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2011), and, for a contemporary discussion of prophecy in southern Africa within its historical context, see H. Kroesbergen (ed.), *Prophecy Today: Reflections from a Southern African Perspective* (Wellington, CLF, 2016).

59 According to Jonathan Walton’s description of a black mega-church in the USA, ‘[t]he organizational structure of World Changers and the overall aesthetic of the ministry convey a corporate rather than an ecclesial identity’ (J.L. Walton, *Watch This!: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Black Televangelism* (New York, New York University Press, 2009), p. 157.

60 Banja, *Faith of Many Colours*, p. 56.

### **Many Styles and Fellowship: Inclusion and Tolerance**

Ministries International offer participation in the special anointing of the leader of that particular ministry, and new ministries arise when somebody who is not yet the leader of his or her own ministry receives such a gift of anointing. As noted earlier, many Zambians do not feel that the new ministries are breaking down the unity of the church. Instead, a common perception is that the ministries are simply expanding the range of worship and ministry styles that are on offer, and when more services are available, more people are likely to be attracted to one or more of these fragments of the one universal church. The new situation can be seen as ecumenical in the sense that its different denominations are very tolerant towards one another: each new Ministry International is considered to be contributing to evangelising the world and reaching out to more people.

J.K. Mugambi, a distinguished Kenyan theologian prominent in the World Council of Churches, contends that such tolerance is actually more an African norm than the continental exception that it is sometimes mistakenly assumed to be: '[i]n most nations of Tropical Africa it is normal to find almost all possible forms of ecclesiastical structure and liturgical expression, all co-existing within a small area, both rural and urban'.<sup>61</sup> Such religious co-existence, usually free of conflict, starts in Christian tolerance among family members, argues Mugambi. He observes, '[i]n African Christianity it is common to have within the same family relatives who have opted to join (for various reasons) different denominations (even religions!). When they meet for family functions they pray together, without religious conflict'.<sup>62</sup> The true extent to which religious conflict actually does enter even into family functions, such as funerals, is a question at the heart of this special issue of *JSAS*. What is clear, however, is that the omnipresence of multiple denominational affiliations does change what ecumenism means as well; that is true, too, for anti-ecumenicalism, especially driven by such churches as the Seventh-Day Adventists. Tolerance and acceptance, rather than a goal to be reached, may rather be the starting point for much grassroots ecumenism. Moreover, given the fact that most of the mushrooming Ministries International, and most of the multiple devotions that believers add to their traditional affiliations, are neo-Pentecostal in nature, Pentecostal approaches to ecumenism to a large extent do influence what ecumenism currently means in southern Africa.<sup>63</sup>

The new Ministries International welcome everybody, whichever church they come from or belong to. Many young men and women are attracted to their gatherings even when they do not actually join the denominations or fellowships permanently.<sup>64</sup> These people participate in multiple devotions, as described above. This also changes the way in which people describe their own affiliation: 'one often hears it being emphasized that "I am not just a Roman Catholic, but a charismatic Catholic"'. Obviously this is to highlight the difference that there is between mere Roman Catholics and those that have a Charismatic spirituality'.<sup>65</sup> On this question of ecumenism across denominations, Munyenembe concludes: '[t]his is one of the ways in which the Charismatic movement is enhancing ecumenism without actually

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61 J.N.K. Mugambi, 'Ecumenism in African Christianity', in Bongmba (ed.), *Routledge Companion*, p. 241.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 239.

63 For long-term observation of conflict and struggles between anti-ecumenical born-again students and the Catholic missionaries in a Catholic boarding school, see A. Simpson, '*Half-London*' in *Zambia: Contested Identities in a Catholic Mission School*, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press for the International African Institute, 2003).

64 Munyenembe, *Christianity and Socio-Cultural Issues*, p. 110.

65 *Ibid.*, p. 110. There is, of course, a global sweep of charismatic influence in the Catholic Church. For influential accounts, see E. O'Connor, *The Pentecostal Movement in the Catholic Church* (Notre Dame, Ave Maria Press, 1971); T. Csordas, *Language, Charisma, and Creativity: The Ritual Life of a Religious Movement* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997).

bringing denominations together'.<sup>66</sup> Influenced by neo-Pentecostalism, Christians in southern Africa do still form denominations – more and more each day. But, from a wider Pentecostal theological perspective, as advocated by the Ghanaian theologian Asamoah-Gyadu, '[t]he essential nature of neo-Pentecostalism is “trans-denominational” because the Holy Spirit is understood “to transcend denominational walls”'.<sup>67</sup> Accordingly, the many new denominations are often filled by people involved in multiple devotions. In Ghana, as in Zambia, many believers continue to frequent their own mainline church on Sunday mornings while, at other times during the week, they visit one or more new neo-Pentecostal Ministries International. A certain passion or structure of feeling in grassroots ecumenism – the feeling that 'we are all Christians' – is what moves people to make such a practice of multiple devotions possible.

In interviews in November 2016, many informants told me that it does not matter much to which denomination one belongs, explaining that this is so 'because we serve one God', or that 'the issue of denomination matters less, the relationship with Christ is all that matters'. Contact between people from different denominations, for example in interdenominational fellowships, does not threaten the unity of the church, but rather 'interdenominational fellowships strengthen the unity of the church'. Similarly I was told, 'interdenominational fellowships make people understand that Christianity goes across the boundaries of denominations. Christ is the common denominator'. The founder of an interdenominational fellowship described how this fellowship taught him that 'Roman Catholics and Jehovah's Witnesses are also worshipping God'. In his own mainline church, he had heard only what was wrong with Roman Catholics and Jehovah's Witnesses. Now that they joined his interdenominational fellowship and were given opportunities to preach, he recognised fellow Christians in them. The new situation creates a grassroots ecumenism highly tolerant of denominational differences.

Boundaries between churches have indeed become more and more fluid, to a large extent due to the influence of charismatic or Pentecostal tendencies. Moreover, the charismatisation or Pentecostalisation of mainline churches is taking place in many different parts of sub-Saharan Africa. On the rise of Pentecostalism in Zambia, in particular, Anderson remarks: 'Zambia in particular has been hugely influenced by Pentecostal Christianity since the accession of Frederick Chiluba to the presidency of the country in 1991. Chiluba was a self-confessed “born again” charismatic who appointed Pentecostals to cabinet posts and declared Zambia to be officially a “Christian nation”'.<sup>68</sup> Many new churches and ministries have been established since the 1990s, but Pentecostal ideas influenced the mainline churches in Zambia as well.

### Conclusion

In Zambia, boundaries between churches and between churches and ministries have become so fluid that they no longer define the limits of ecumenical co-operation. Given this new context, the differences among Christians within and without their own denominations have multiplied: boundaries between churches or ministries, and differences in faith and practice no longer coincide. There are no entrenched boundaries left to bridge, while the differences are too diffuse and too infinitely diverse even to be the object of attempts at reconciliation. This article has shown that 'multiple devotions', 'mushrooming Ministries International' and cross-overs in charismatic transmission create a very special situation. It is in no way a simple carry-over from the past. Instead, old boundaries are becoming ever more porous, and fresh differences are multiplying to such an extent that a new – perhaps unstable and still conflicted

66 Munyenembe, *Christianity and Socio-Cultural Issues*, p. 110.

67 Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity*, pp. 10–11.

68 A.H. Anderson, 'Pentecostalism in Southern Africa', in Bongmba (ed.), *Routledge Companion*, p. 324.

– kind of grassroots ecumenism has emerged and is continuing to foster distinctive ways of being Christian in Zambia.