

# How do we succeed as a church in Sweden ...an African response

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## 1. Introduction

The face of Christianity has changed during the last decades, and the center of it has moved from Europe and North America to what we can call the Global South, which includes parts of Asia, Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>1</sup> One of the segments of Christianity which has had an extraordinary growth in the Global South is Pentecostalism.<sup>2</sup>

This shift of Christianity's center has also led to a shift in mission. Several churches from parts of Africa, Latin America and Asia are now sending missionaries to Europe and North America. This change has been described by scholars<sup>3</sup> and studied in several countries. This paper will focus on a specific church, Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) from Nigeria, and its mission in Scandinavia in general and Sweden in particular.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Nigerian Pentecostalism

A country which has played a central role in Pentecostalism in Africa as well as its mission to Europe is Nigeria.<sup>5</sup> Pentecostalism established itself in Nigeria in the beginning

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<sup>1</sup> This process has been described in Jenkins, Philip, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> For a further description of Pentecostalism, I refer to Anderson, Allan, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. I will use the inclusive definition of Pentecostalism that Anderson describes on page 9 and forward.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g., Droogers, André & van der Laan, Cornelius & van Laar, Wout, (eds), *Fruitful in this Land – Pluralism, Dialogue and Healing in Migrant Pentecostalism*, Utigeverij Boekencentrum, Zoetermeer, The Netherlands, 2006. Ter Haar, Gerrie, *Halfway to Paradise: African Christians in Europe*, Cardiff: Cardiff

<sup>4</sup> For a research project on Redeemed Christian Church of God that covers this church in UK, the Netherlands and Germany, see <http://www.glopent.net/norface> (accessed 2010-06-26)

<sup>5</sup> For a broader analysis of African Pentecostalism, see the late Kalu, Ogbu, *African Pentecostalism; An Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008. For more on Nigerian Pentecostalism, see Ojo, Matthews A. *The End-Time Army; Charismatic Movements in Modern Nigeria*, Trenton NJ, Africa World Press, 2006.

of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through missionaries, even if there are discussions about how the relationship between Pentecostal missionaries and local revivals should be interpreted.<sup>6</sup>

Nigeria has seen an explosion in the growth of Pentecostal churches, which had its origin in revivals at the universities, beginning in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>7</sup> The new Pentecostal churches emerging from the revival, sometimes labeled New Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches (NPCs)<sup>8</sup> to distinguish them from older Pentecostal denominations, are often known for using media and technology and promoting a “Prosperity Gospel”<sup>9</sup> From my own experience in Nigeria 2007<sup>10</sup>, I can describe their services as very dynamic and vibrant with lots of loud music (often with a mixture of traditional drums and modern instruments, such as keyboards). They often include long sections of worship as well as preachings for hours or all-night prayer. It is also popular to assemble people at big meetings, which either take place on the church's own property, like the camp sites outside Lagos that many of the churches have, or at a rented stadium.

One other distinctive feature I meet is the focus of the leader as a mediator of the divine impartation, whether it is a healing or another blessing from God. The focus is the spiritual anointing of the leader.<sup>11</sup> At the same time several of the leading Pentecostal leaders are academically educated and have degrees and experience from working at universities.<sup>12</sup> They tend to attract members of a middle classes in the bigger cities. This does not mean that Pentecostalism is not present in the countryside but that the big well-known NPCs are focusing on the cities.

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<sup>6</sup> Anderson, Allan *Spreading the Fires; The Missionary Nature of Early Pentecostalism*, London, SCM Press, 2007. p 161-167.

<sup>7</sup> See Burgess, Richard, *Nigeria's Christian revolution; The Civil War Revival and Its Pentecostal Progeny (1967-2006)*, Milton Keynes, Paternoster Press, 2008, which describes the revival in eastern Nigeria, and Ojo, Matthews A. *The End-Time Army; Charismatic Movements in Modern Nigeria*, Trenton NJ, Africa World Press, 2006, which focuses more on the revival in the western part of the country.

<sup>8</sup> See Anderson, Allan *The Proliferation and Varieties of Pentecostalism in the Majority World*, in Droogers & van der Laan & van Laar, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> For more on prosperity gospel, see Perriman, Andrew, *Faith; Health & Prosperity*, Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2003. *Positive Confession Theology* article in Burges, Stanley M. (editor) & van der Maas (Associated Editor), *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Malmström, Nils, *How to interpret a case of African Pentecostalism? - Focusing upon classification, formative processes and characteristics of contemporary Nigerian Pentecostalism*, unpublished essay, Center for Theology and Religion, Lund University, 2009.

<sup>11</sup> I attended an Evangelistic Crusade in Ile-Ife, where local pastors from various churches had invited a well-known evangelist. At the moment when they were to pray for the sick, the evangelist began to pray together with the local pastors. After a moment the evangelist interrupted the prayers and asked some other pastors to come forward and help, because those local pastors were not spiritual enough for the task.

<sup>12</sup> To take some of the best known Pentecostal leaders in Nigeria, David O. Oyedepo leader of Winners Chapel holds a senior degree in Architecture, William Kumayi from Deeper Life Bible Church a degree in Mathematics and Daniel Kolawe Olukoyu, leader of Mountains of Fire and Miracles holds two degrees, one in microbiology and one in molecular genetics.

### 3. Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG)

One of the most influential of these churches is the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), today one of the larger Pentecostal churches in Nigeria with over 10 000 congregations in more than 80 counties.<sup>13</sup>

This church was founded in 1952 by Joshua Olufemi Akindayomi together with eleven other men. They were all former members of the Cherubim and Serafim<sup>14</sup> church. Joshua was already known as a prophet in his former church, which gave him the leader role in the group. As the founder of RCCG Joshua had high status, and the usual story tells how he as an illiterate saw a text on the wall, saying “Redeemed Christian Church of God” and tried to write it down and then took the text to a relative who explained the meaning to him<sup>15</sup>. But others have shown that he came in contact with a church mission society already at the age of 18 and tried to acquire some formal education. Even though he abandoned this objective, he learnt to read and understand the Yoruba bible as well as to speak some English.<sup>16</sup> So the story seems to have the purpose of showing the miraculous nature of the start of the church. During the earlier years of RCCG, it was much dominated by uneducated women and artisans, and the major feature of its teaching was holiness and the turning away from worldliness.

After the death of Joshua, Enoch Adeboye became leader of the church.<sup>17</sup> This brought a new era to the church with modernization and transformation. It was now that the growth of the church took off. Adeboye, a former lecturer of mathematics at Lagos University, is called the General Overseer, sometimes abbreviated G.O., which is the highest position in the church, and he is the central person in it. Under his leadership the church became an international church with missionary work all over the world. The fact that Adeboye in 2008 appeared on a Newsweek list of the 50 most influential leaders in the world, really shows that he has succeeded in making his church international.<sup>18</sup> It is also during his time that prosperity theology became important in the church.

The mission of the church is described in a simple way like this.

#### *Our Mission Statement*<sup>19</sup>

1. *To make heaven.*
2. *To take as many people as possible with us.*

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<sup>13</sup> Ukah, Aszoneh, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power; A study of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria*, Trenton NJ, Africa World Press, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> One of the so called Aladura churches, which are part of what is known as African Initiated Churches (AIC), see Anderson, Allan, *African Reformation; African Initiated Christianity in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, Trenton NJ, Africa World Press, 2001. Pp 80-86.

<sup>15</sup> From the brochure “If Only We Pray”, Europe Mainland’s Inaugural Minister Conference, Bella Center, Copenhagen, Denmark 24<sup>th</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup> May 2010.

<sup>16</sup> See Ukah pp 17

<sup>17</sup> For a fuller description of the transition of leadership see Ukah, Aszoneh, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power – A study of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria*, African World Press, Trenton, NJ, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.newsweek.com/2008/12/19/49-e-a-adeboye.html> (accessed 2010-06-30)

<sup>19</sup> From the brochure “If Only We Pray”, Europe Mainland’s Inaugural Minister Conference, Bella Center, Copenhagen, Denmark 23-25 May 2010.

3. *To have a member of RCCG in every family of all nations.*
4. *To accomplish No.1 above, holiness will be our lifestyle.*
5. *To accomplish Nos. 2 and 3 above, we will plant churches within five minutes walking distance in every city and town of developing countries and within five minutes driving distance in every city and town of developed countries. We will pursue these objectives until every Nation in the World is reached for Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Beside the growth of the church, much emphasis is placed on the campsite “Redemption Camp” at the road between Lagos and Ibadan. It is the church's center, and it is here they gather their people to the Holy Ghost Night services once a month. The camp, which more looks like a small city, is described as an almost sacred place. It is the place they describe as where “Kingdom of Heaven” is reproduced on earth.<sup>20</sup>

RCCGs mission to Europe started in the UK in 1985. The work in Europe is divided in two parts, one in UK and Ireland<sup>21</sup> with headquarters in London and one on the continent with headquarters in the Hague in the Netherlands.<sup>22</sup>

Since the main focus is on church planning, the role of the pastor is important. The church has a clear description of what a parish pastor is to do<sup>23</sup>

*“S/He is the representative of the General Overseer in his Parish. As an under-shepherd under the Great Shepherd of our souls, s/he is expected to do the work of a shepherd in truth and indeed. Her/his responsibilities include the following:*

### ***Main Responsibilities***

#### ***1. Church Growth***

- *Sees to the establishment of new parishes by making sure that the parish duplicates itself at least once every year.*
- *Organises revival and evangelistic programmes for the parish*

#### ***2. Administration***

- *Organises the workers in groups and ministries to effectively engage them in evangelistic activities.*
- *Organises the various groups in the church for effective utilization of their abilities. Such groups include elders' fellowship, men fellowship, good women, youth fellowship etc.*
- *Maintains proper financial records, hands over the monthly report and cash returns to the Area Pastor every month.*
- *Ensures that the place of worship of the parish is conducive, and maintains an inventory of church properties.*

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<sup>20</sup> For a more detailed discussion of RCCG in Nigeria, see Ukah (about the Redemption Camps see pp 257)

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.rccguk.org/> (accessed 2010-07-02)

<sup>22</sup> <http://rccgeuropemainland.org> (accessed 2010-06-24)

<sup>23</sup> [http://rccgeuropemainland.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=109:responsibilities-of-country-coordinations](http://rccgeuropemainland.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=109:responsibilities-of-country-coordinations) (accessed 2010-06-24)

### 3. *Welfare*

- *Ensures the spiritual, soul and physical well-being of the workers and other ministers working with him.*
- *Arranges regular visitation to church members and ensures the needy in the congregation receive adequate assistance.*

### 4. *Training/Development*

- *Sees to effective utilization of every member of his church as the goal is to make every member a worker.*
- *Sees to the training and enlisting of new workers*

### 5. *General*

- *Participates in all meetings or conferences organized by his Area Pastor, that is, those meetings that are mandatory for him to attend.*
- *Carries out any other duty allocated to him by his superiors as long as such will not lead to sin.”*

## 4. **RCCG in Scandinavia**

During 2005 and 2006, I made a study of RCCG in Scandinavia, which resulted in an essay at Lund University.<sup>24</sup> The present paper will partly be based on interviews and observations I did for that essay but also on material, talks and observation I have done subsequently in contact with RCCG in Europe. Even though my focus has been Scandinavia, I have also visited some RCCG churches in the UK and also interviewed RCCG pastors from Holland and Ireland, when they visited Sweden. I will also use material and experience from a visit in Nigeria 2007 which also resulted in an essay.<sup>25</sup>

Redeemed Christian Church of God started in Scandinavia in Copenhagen in 1995 and has today 21 parishes, 10 of which are in Sweden<sup>26</sup>. The Scandinavian headquarters has recently been relocated from Copenhagen to Malmö. The churches have around 50–100 members each, mostly persons of Nigerian origin or from other African countries. But there are a few other nationalities like Swedish, Danish, Lithuanian, Latvian and Indian. Since Sweden does not allow registering people by ethnicity or religion, it is hard to get any numbers of “Africans” living in Sweden, although some statistics from 2008 indicate that over 80 000 persons born in Africa were living in Sweden.<sup>27</sup> So compared to these figures the RCCG members are a minority of the Africans in Sweden. In media the group that gets most attention is Somalians, which also appeared in my interviews, when one of the pastors mentioned that people on the street often mistook him as a Somalian.

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<sup>24</sup> Malmström, Nils, *Bringing the Gospel back to Europe. En studie av Redeemed Christian Church of Gods mission i Storbritannien och Skandinavien*, unpublished essay, Center for Theology and Religion, Lund University, 2006.

<sup>25</sup> Malmström, Nils, *How to interpret a case of African Pentecostalism? Focusing upon classification, formative processes and characteristics of contemporary Nigerian Pentecostalism*, Unpublished essay Center for Theology and Religion, Lund University, 2009.

<sup>26</sup> Stockholm, Göteborg, Malmö (2), Uppsala, Borås, Karlskrona, Borlänge, Växjö.

<sup>27</sup> Robinson Diakité, Madubuko A., *Basic Facts About the African Diaspora*. In Stephens, Kolade, *Afrikansvenska Röster*, Notisförlag, 2009. pp168.

The RCCG churches in Sweden<sup>28</sup> have names which consist of RCCG, followed by e.g., Restoration Assembly, Solution Centre, Jesus Connections, King's Connection, Grace Connections, Pacesetters Connections and Life Gate Parish.<sup>29</sup> The names seem to point to the message of success and confidence that they are here to set a trend and solve people's problems.

All pastors I met except one are of Nigerian origin and all except one came to Sweden or another European country to study and then felt the call to start a church. The only exception was the pastor in Gothenburg, who was sent from the UK to take over the RCCG church when they needed a new pastor. A pastor from Holland visiting Sweden told me that he had trained as a pastor in Nigeria and then was sent to Holland to help with the work there.

## 5. The Mission to Sweden

*"I will say what we are doing now is more of pioneer work to get in the Swedish culture and Swedish system."*<sup>30</sup>

All the pastors and members I interviewed explained that their desire and goal as Christians and as a church in Europe was to bring the gospel back to Europe. To re-evangelize countries that once had been Christian but now have turned their backs on God and instead gone into secularism and other ungodly practices. They often claim to have this calling in order to pay back a debt that they as African Christians have to Europe because it was European missionaries who once brought the gospel to their countries.<sup>31</sup>

Their mission can be accomplished in two ways. The first is that they will themselves evangelize and win converts to their churches. That means to establish churches and take as many with them to heaven as possible. This is the main vision of RCCG.

The second aspect is to cooperate with other churches in Europe to encourage and bring life into them. One example of this is e.g., Denmark where RCCG have been active in organizing prayer on the National Prayer day (Store Bededag) which is a national holiday going back to 1686.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See <http://www.rccgscandinavia.org/> (Accessed 2010-06-28)

<sup>29</sup> One reason for the name Connections is that several churches are supported or started with help from the Royal Connections church in UK. Its pastor David Sola Oludoye is also a regular visitor and speaker in many of the RCCG churches in Sweden. See <http://www.royalconnections.org.uk> (accessed 2010-06-28)

<sup>30</sup> Pastor Tutu Olutay of RCCG Jesus Connections in an interview 2005-07-13

<sup>31</sup> This is in many ways the same as in other European countries see Währisch-Oblau, Claudia, *The Missionary Self-Perception of Pentecostal/Charismatic Church Leaders from the Global South in Europe*, Leiden, Brill 2009.

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/artikel/364179:Kirke---tro--Kristne-nydanskere-beder-Gud-hjaelpe-Danmark> (accessed 2010-06-30) and from the brochure "If Only We Pray", Europe Mainland's Inaugural Minister Conference, Bella Center, Copenhagen, Denmark 23-25 May 2010. pp 9.

Also, cooperation exists between RCCG King's Connection and the local Methodist Church in the city of Karlskrona. Beside prayers and preaching they also cooperated on sending aid to poor people in Lithuania.<sup>33</sup>

But they also show that they have responsibility to the Nigerian or African diaspora in Europe. Their message here is to help their fellow Africans to cope with their immigrant situation.

On the first point several of my interviewees said that when they arrived in Sweden or started a church here, they used methods and a message similar to what they knew from Nigeria. That would mean an emphasis on evangelization, talking to people on the street or other public places, and arranging different meetings and conferences, which they advertised, using leaflets, posters, etc. This might include "Healing Service", "Miracle Meeting", "Breakthrough Night" or "Gospel Music Night", activities that according to several pastors mostly attracted Africans and other minority groups.

Another way is to have prayer events where they pray to change the spiritual atmosphere in the city or the country.

Enoch Adeboye means that RCCG initially focused on three things, holiness, evangelism and prayer. The two first things are well established in RCCG in Europe, but the last one, prayer, is what is now needed to accomplish the goal of an end-time global revival that includes Europe.<sup>34</sup>

As for what they pray for, the following points gives an example what the believers should pray for in Europe.

#### *PRAYER FOR THE MISSION (RCCG)<sup>35</sup>*

- 1. Ask God to uproot every plant that He has not planted in His church. Mt 15:13*
- 2. Pray for the miraculous recovery of members who are battling with one sickness or the other. Jer 8.22*
- 3. Ask God in His loving mercy, and by His saving grace, to make sinners amidst the fold come to true repentance and salvation. Pet 3:9*
- 4. Ask God to give each member the heart to loath sins as true disciples of the Lord. Isa 52:11*
- 5. Ask God to raise more men and women who are genuine Kingdom builders for the Mission especially from amongst the youths. Ex.17:8-13.*
- 6. Ask God to rekindle the fire of love and true fellowship amongst the brethren. Ac 2:42-47, Php 2:1-11, 1Joh 1:6-7*
- 7. Ask God for the salvation of the youths and for their commitment to the course of His Kingdom Ecc 12.1-7, Ps 37:4 -5*

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<sup>33</sup> E-mail from Methodist pastor Walla Carlsson 2010-06-28

<sup>34</sup> From the brochure "If Only We Pray", Europe Mainland's Inaugural Minister Conference, Bella Center, Copenhagen, Denmark 24<sup>th</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup> May 2010, pp 4.

<sup>35</sup> [http://rccgeuropemainland.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=94&Itemid=130](http://rccgeuropemainland.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=94&Itemid=130) (accessed 2010-06-24)

## **6. The Problems and Challenges**

The languages are the crucial issue for many pastors. Only one of the pastors I interviewed preached or led the service in Swedish, although several of them told me how they were struggling to learn Swedish (or Danish) and had the goal to be able to. But here they met an internal struggle in the mind of the church members. Officially, the only accepted languages in the RCCG activities in Sweden are English and Swedish. But during my observations I found instances where people used Yoruba, the most common RCCG language in Nigeria. Several of the pastors had found that it was a struggle to teach and motivate the people in the church to use Swedish, because several members see the church as a place to meet and associate with fellow Africans.

One solution to this problem is to have special Sundays where everything is in Swedish. At the same time they also have a so called Multicultural Sunday which takes place twice a year, when everybody is to come in their African clothes and sing African songs and celebrate the diversity of the church as a multicultural event. They also allow other groups in the church to act. One service I attended included Nigerian songs (both in Yoruba and Igbo) as well as other African languages, but also songs in Lithuanian and Latvian by some members from the Baltic countries.

None of the pastors, as far as I know, lack papers and permits to stay legally in Sweden, although I learnt that several RCCG pastors in Europe do. This was one of the prayer points at their minister conference in Copenhagen this May.

When it comes to contact with and acceptance from other churches in Sweden, the experiences are different. One pastor had the feeling that pastors from traditional churches in that city just saw him as black person that needed their help but not as an equal pastor colleague in the city. But in other cities, as I mentioned earlier, good cooperation exists with other churches.

However, my general impression when talking to people of ecumenical organizations or churches in Sweden is that there is a lack of knowledge of the existence of RCCG and other similar migrant churches.

## **7. The Needs in Sweden**

When confronted with the reality of living in Sweden and seeing that the method they used in Nigeria did not function here, there was a general search for a solution. One solution is to try to find the needs in Sweden and solve them with the power of the Gospel.

So what then are the needs for Swedish people, that the pastors have found out?

One thing where they seem a little bit ambivalent is the question of healings. As a Pentecostal church, healings of course play a central role both in belief and practice. It is an integral part of their services and church life. The question is whether it should be used as a tool for evangelism. As one pastor concludes, Swedish people do not need to come to church when they are sick because they have a very good health care system. So talking about healing is nothing that will attract Swedish people to their church. However, another



pastor gave as his vision that his church will become a center for healing and miracles that will attract the sick people in his region.

*“you know what I believe make Sweden not to fear God so that’s that everything is there. There is money, there is health service, in fact sick people in Sweden some of them maybe disabled people don’t want to be healed, because they will lose their bidrag (welfare money) ... ”<sup>36</sup>*

Several pastors said that a big problem in Sweden where they should be able to help is addiction to drugs and alcohol. Another potential area was loneliness and depression.

Another is that Swedish people need to believe in the existence of God. Several pastors said that in Nigeria there is never a question whether you believe in God's existence or not, but rather if you live for him or not. One pastor from UK mentioned that they would start so called Alpha courses<sup>37</sup> to attract British people. The leading question in these courses is: Does God exist? What is the meaning of Life? This type of questions does not attract Nigerians who according to him prefer a miracle or a healing.

Two controversial areas where the RCCG pastors said that they could contribute to Swedish churches were ministry to homosexuals and Muslims. One pastor said that he and his church had the message that it is possible to be free from homosexuality by means of prayer and God's power. Mission to Muslims was mentioned by another pastor who told me that he was going to learn Arabic to be able to reach out to Muslims and that this was an important task.

This may seem a little contradictory because, according to Ukah<sup>38</sup>, Adeboye has used a strategy where he is silent on issues like conversions of muslims and prefers a low non-confrontational attitude where peaceful coexistence among people of other faiths seems to be a goal. Here more research is needed because at the same time I heard the regional coordinator for Europe, pastor Dele Olowu, warn about a future of Europe (Euroarabia) where muslims are dominating.

But besides all this there is a common thing that nearly all the pastors talk about and that is to preach hope and expectance that God can and will intervene in your life. And this is a message they say is for everybody.

## **8. How to Measure Success**

Success or prosperity is an important part of the message from the pastors. The question then is, how do RCCG measure success?

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<sup>36</sup> Pastor Tutu Olutay of RCCG Jesus Connections in an interview 2005-07-13

<sup>37</sup> A way of presenting the basic Christian faith in small groups to ordinary people. Began in a local parish of the Church of England and the concept has now spread all over the world. See <http://uk.alpha.org/>

<sup>38</sup> Ukah, Aszoneh, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power; A study of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria*, Trenton NJ, Africa World Press, 2008. pp 290.

One motto that they use is that they are a church where “Expectations become manifestations”, i.e. they want to emphasize that when a person has faith in God, it will produce visible results.

One way of spreading the message of success is through testimonies of blessings which people can give during a service or in a personal talk with you. Examples of subjects of such testimonies are

Church members have bought houses in Sweden.

Someone has established a business.

A man has bought a new car for his taxi company

Healing from an illness

A member has received her proper papers with work permit and the possibility to stay legally in Sweden.

Another example of success was when one of the churches had as a member a professional soccer player from Nigeria, and for this reason received attention from media, resulting in an visit of journalist to the church service.

But the most important success is that they have established new churches and thus are fulfilling their call, especially that some of their newest churches are located outside the main regions of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö. So, establishing churches in Växjö, Borlänge and Skövde (under way) is important to mark the fact that they are winning new ground.

But there are also areas where they feel they are failing.

One pastor with whom I first talked five years ago admits today that his church had not grown the way he predicted five years ago. But he said that at least the people in his church had grown more spiritual during these years.

One major setback has been in Stockholm where they lost their church when the pastor left RCCG and took the congregations with him to start an independent church. So they had to start a new RCCG church again in Stockholm with a new pastor.

## **9. The Question of Theological Education**

The pastors I interviewed had or were on their way to achieve academic degrees in different subjects as e.g., marketing, food science or maritime affairs. But none of them had any theological education or pastoral training before starting the churches. I therefore think it is interesting to relate to what Dr Olufunke Adeboye (no relation to Enoch Adeboye) from the University of Lagos says in a paper about the situation in Brazil and Nigeria.

*In Brazil as well as in Nigeria, the issue of the training of Pastors has generated tensions. While the more denominational Pentecostal Churches have seminaries and Bible Colleges where their clergy are trained, the neo-Pentecostals emphasize charismatic and pneumatic gifts above formal training. And the tendency among the latter is to regard seminary-trained pastors as ‘overeducated’ and lacking in evangelical zeal and*

*devotional fervour. So while the Pastors may be educated (many of such neo-Pentecostal Pastors in Nigeria are in fact University graduates), they lack professional pastoral training and grooming, they only learn on the job. Such pastors 'graduate' by establishing their own congregations, and they insist they have been equipped by the 'divine call', which they had in a dream, vision, prophecy, or through some inner illumination. They therefore consider this call to be more important than formal training. This explains their inadequacies. This also describes the situation in most one-branch ministries in Nigeria.<sup>39</sup>*

At the same time the problems generated by this lack of education or missionary preparation are being discussed by the pastors in Scandinavia. I talked to pastor Tutu Olutayo, who has become the Swedish coordinator. He pointed out that there is a need for education but there are obstacles. There is no time and possibility for the pastors to take the time off to go to a bible school or seminary.

I believe that one reason for the lack of theological training of RCCG pastors in Europe is the way RCCG starts churches. Many of the pastors come to Europe as students and first after a while did they feel the call to start a church. The emphasis of success and the thought that anointed preaching is what will decide the growth, does in a way explain why they see no need of education.

There is an urge to expand. At RCCG Europe Mainland's Inaugural Ministers Conference, which took place on the 23–25 May 2010, the General Overseer Enoch Adeboye gave the churches in Mainland Europe the task to establish 400 churches by August 2010. I talked to the National Coordinator for Sweden after this, but at that time they had not decided how many churches that would mean for Sweden. But it shows the problem, because now they need people who can start churches or take over already existing parishes, when the pastor moves on to start a new one at another place.

But at the same time there is a missionary education run by RCCG in Nigeria called The Redeemed Christian School of Missions (RECSOM)

*“RECSOM started with three (3) students at the Redemption Camp as a Department of RCBC. It was later upgraded to become a full-fledge institute. It moved to a temporary rented building in Olowo-bida Street, Ede in Osun state. In year 2000, it moved to its permanent campus at Ede, Osun state. There is ongoing development of physical structures (buildings, landscapes, roads etc) at the permanent campus with the expectation that the school would transform into a tertiary institute with charter (accreditation to award degrees in missions and leadership).*

*Having trained a few and yet pursuing the mandate with the vision of having over a thousand graduates annually, RECSOM at this August 2008 turned-out 314 Students beside the tent-makers.*

## **OUR VISION**

*RECSOM seeks to train Christians with definite call and conviction for cross-cultural*

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<sup>39</sup> Adeboye, Olufunke A. “Pentecostal Challenges in Africa and Latin America: A Comparative Focus on Nigeria and Brazil” *Afrika Zamani*, Nos. 11 & 12, 2003–2004, pp. 136–159 (<http://www.codesria.org/IMG/pdf/8-Adeboye.pdf> (accessed 2010-06-24))

*missions within the rural and urban context, who would use all communicable forms to present the gospel to all the people of the world .*

### **OUR MISSION FOCUS**

*The entire programme of RECSOM is planned based on the commitment of RCCG to plant parishes in all the countries of the world.”<sup>40</sup>*

*Course offered at RECSOM*

#### **Compulsory**

1. *Language*
2. *Biblical Doctrine*
3. *Practical Attachment.*

#### *Basic Missiological Studies*

4. *Life on The Mission Field*
5. *Language Learning Techniques*
6. *History of Missions*
7. *Theology of Missions*
8. *Mission Research*
9. *Strategies of Missions*
10. *Educational Missions*
11. *Agricultural Missions*
12. *Medicine in Missions*
13. *Appropriate Technology*
14. *Language Acquisition Techniques*

#### *Advanced Missiological Studies*

15. *Islam*
16. *Principles of Mobilization*
17. *Cross-Cultural Communication*
18. *Church Planting*
19. *Church And Urban Missions*
20. *Comparative Religion*
21. *Rural missions*
22. *African Traditional Religion (ATR)*
23. *Principles of Church Growth*
24. *Contextualization*

#### *Christian Ministry*

25. *Personal Edification*
26. *Understanding the Ministry and Spiritual Gifts*
27. *Children Evangelism*
28. *Youth Evangelism*
29. *Discipleship*
30. *Spiritual Warfare*

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<sup>40</sup> <http://recsom.net/about.htm> 2010-06-23 (accessed 2010-06-23). See also Ukah p.136.

31. *Principles of Management*
32. *Leadership*
33. *Church Communication*
34. *Serving God in Difficult Places*
35. *Christian Mission and Law*

#### *Biblical Studies*

36. *Pastoral Theology*
37. *Homiletics*
38. *Christian Counseling*
39. *Bible Survey (OT)*
40. *Bible Study (NT)*
41. *Theology of Faith*
42. *Evangelism*
43. *Hermeneutics*

#### *Tent Making*

44. *Vocational Training*
45. *Skill Acquisition*
46. *Cultural Anthropology and Social work*

So there is an education program with courses which seem to aim at preparing pastors for mission in other countries and cultures. The question then is if this shows that there is a tension within RCCG, which could be described in sociological typology like the difference of being a sect or a church.<sup>41</sup> This makes a clash between the need for education and training and the need to show that the assignment as pastor is based on anointing and divine gifting.

The interesting thing is to see what is needed to achieve the missionary work they have set up to accomplish. And maybe theological education in some form could help them to both ask the right questions and analyze the problem.

Adefunke has listed three issues which he thinks can explain the problems churches like RCCG have in attracting people in e.g., Europe.

*In the same vein, the RCCG has not been able to attract the nationals among whom its transnational branches are established. In the US, Europe and in Asia, it is identified as a 'Nigerian' or 'black' church popular among Nigerian diasporic communities and other migrant groups.*

*Three factors could be held responsible for this alienation, which cuts across Latin American and African transnational churches planted in the global North. One is the emphasis on demons and other supernatural explanations for events and various human predicaments. Ogbu Kalu describes this as an attempt by Pentecostals to preserve the African configuration of the spiritual universe. He identifies several similarities in Pentecostal beliefs and those of African traditional religion in respect to the knowledge of*

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<sup>41</sup> I mean here like the way Ernst Troeltsch described this. See Hunt, Stephen J., *Alternative Religions; A Sociological Introduction*, Hampshire, Ashgate Publishing, 2003. pp 34-37.

*the spiritual world. This, to him, is not syncretism, but represents elements of continuity in the religious lives of Africans. Again, this has been described by Gifford as an 'enchanted' worldview, which incidentally is prevalent, not only in Africa, but also in Latin America (via the Afro-Brazilian religion). It is this same worldview that underpins the 'deliverance theology of many of the Pentecostal churches. The problem lies in the fact that these Pentecostal churches have been unable to adapt to cultures in which people do not share the same worldview that emphasize the activities of witches, demons and other spiritual agents. There is therefore little common discursive ground between these Pentecostals and their host nations. The second factor has to do with the boisterous worship style and aggressive evangelical strategies of the Pentecostal churches, which also need to be adapted to suit the receiving societies. The third factor is the practice described by Paul Freston as 'direct ecclesiastical transplant' according to which 'the UCKG and most other Brazilian Pentecostal denominations' employ in their trans-national outreaches, virtually the same techniques that have served them well in Brazil.<sup>74</sup> This practice is also to be found among African Pentecostal denominations. While its failure rate is high, this doctrine works well in areas with some similarities with the Pentecostal home nation. A case in point is the success of the UCKG in South Africa. The reasons for this success, according to Freston are: similarity of context—'considerable urbanization, good infrastructure and a certain cosmopolitanism and racial diversity'. The second reason is the fact that the UCKG was able to take advantage of the frustrations of unmet hopes and aspirations in the wake of the inauguration of South African democracy. Thus the UCKG '... [appealed] both to the disappointed as well as to those who need moral reinforcement to take advantage of the new opportunities'. He however offers no explanation for the paucity of white South Africans in the UCKG, which interestingly reflects the preponderance of blacks and coloured peoples in mainstream Brazilian Pentecostalism. Meanwhile, other studies of African Pentecostal transnationalism show that this policy of direct ecclesiastical transplant is mostly counter-productive. All these boil down to the issue of effectively translating the Pentecostal package from one culture to another.*

On the first point I agree that of course there are differences of views of the world, but the RCCG churches I have met both in Europe and Nigeria do not seem to emphasize demons or witchcraft as the major force behind problems but instead the lack of faith or understanding of the gospel. I am also afraid that talking about an African view of the world is kind of troublesome because there are many African views of the world as well as European. E.g., research among young people in Sweden has shown that there is a rather strong belief, e.g., that there is a spiritual world populated by spirits of ancestors with whom it is possible to communicate.<sup>42</sup> We must also not forget that we could talk about a Biblical or Pentecostal view of the world (often there are no clear lines between those) where supernatural occurrences are a part of the explanation of the world.

I have more understanding for Adefunke's second argument even though I could say it is a matter of being able to understand religious expressions and languages. In a secular country as Sweden I think that there can be just as big a problem for a person to understand a morning service in the church of Sweden if you do not have some kind of pre-knowledge.

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<sup>42</sup> Sjödin Ulf, *En skola, flera världar; Värderingar hos elever och lärare i religionskunskap i gymnasieskolan*, Stockholm, Plus Ultra, 1995. pp 81.

The third argument is maybe the most interesting. Even for me as a researcher it took some time to understand the structure and organization of RCCG. How does an ordinary Swede understand the structure of power in RCCG? How do he/she relate to the place the General Overseer Enoch Adeboye has in the organization?

The ecumenical contacts between RCCG and other churches could also benefit from an understanding of the value of theological education. Here I think that the situation has progressed further in the UK, where there are contacts between RCCG and the Church of England.<sup>43</sup>

## **10. Summary**

The Redeemed Christian Church of God, one of the leading Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria, have established themselves in Europe as one of the dominating missionary churches with the goal of reaching Europe with the gospel and establish churches all over the continent. They have showed that it is possible to establish churches even in countries with a smaller African population like Sweden.

Now they are facing the task of trying to overcome the cultural barrier in Europe to accomplish their goal of bringing as many people with them to heaven as possible. The question of theological education and training to equip them for this task is crucial to the success of their mission.

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<sup>43</sup> For example I interviewed Yemi Adedeji (2005-11-25), a member of RCCG who works for Church Mission Society, the Anglican mission organization. He meant that RCCG could learn a lot from the theological depth of the Church of England as well as they in return could learn from the prayer and evangelistic zeal of RCCG.