

# Charismatic experiences in the Congo Evangelistic Mission Churches: A review of some practices



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Deliverance and divine healing, as well as the crucial historical aspect of the mission's early proselytising and development in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), constitute the major characteristics of Pentecostalism. As they form a historical aspect of the mission's development, it is not surprising that its preservation has not only remained at the core of the church's ethos, but also continues to increase exponentially. This article investigated some praxis, specifically in the churches founded by the Congo Evangelistic Mission (CEM): the ransom and the fire, the laying of hands and anointing oil, successively as deliverance and divine healing practices. The purpose was to establish the extent to which these churches founded by CEM can move away from these practices and find in Christ the better life they seek. It is to critically reflect on the deliverance and divine healing practices in the church and how the applicability of these practices affects people's lives, including members and non-members. The qualitative method was utilised for the study. Data was collected through in-depth (semi-structured) interviews and direct observation in the churches founded by the CEM. The findings of this study show that the emergence of these traditionalist practices in the churches founded by the CEM would inadvertently lead to a disregard for in-depth biblical and theological knowledge and eventually result in the further diminishment of the essence of the Christian faith. This study has two implications: (1) the spread of doctrinal abuses is largely due to ignorance and neglect of the church's doctrines, particularly pneumatology (Pentecostal doctrine), even though the teaching of this doctrine has provided the Pentecostal theological context for the mission's foundation since its inception. (2) The divisions within the CEM churches have become more frequent and thereby making it difficult for many pastors to lead their members, especially those with charismatic gifts (prophets, Balombi).

**Contribution:** Focusing specifically on charismatic gifts, this article establishes theological guidelines that would revive the Church's missiological impulse. The guidelines for dealing with these practices will better equip Pentecostal church members to practice the charismatic gifts in light of the New Testament perspectives.

**Keywords:** charismatic experiences; Congo Evangelistic Mission; churches; review; practices; deliverance; healings.

## Introduction

Pentecostalism encompasses individual and collective charismatic experiences that result from the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Albrecht 1992:114). From this perspective, Pentecostal theology is inextricably grounded on the experience of the Day of Pentecost with its dynamism and power; it is thus distinguished by the praxis of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and its attendant implications for the mission of the church (Pocock 1997:10). This experience is often perceived as the concretisation of the divine presence through the manifestation of charismatic gifts such as divine healing, deliverance and prophesy to mention a few. Church members who are baptised in the Holy Spirit are often accorded respect and naturally expected to serve as ministers for the performance of charismatic manifestations. This assertion is affirmed by the Congo Evangelistic Mission (CEM) members interviewed for this study, who insist that differential treatment exists between Christians who have been baptised in the Holy Spirit and those who have not. This view comes from the missionaries, as they always have declared that one native baptised in the Holy Spirit is worth a thousand others blindly proclaiming the gospel (Burton 1967:99–100; Moorhead 1922:199).

The CEM is the first Pentecostal mission established in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 1915 among the Luba people of Katanga. Prior to the establishment of the mission, the people

were embroiled in divination, magic and other traditional religious practices. Since its inception, the CEM has experienced phenomenal numerical growth regardless of the traditional (primitive) practices of the people and the initial challenges encountered by the mission. It has successfully propagated Pentecostalism across the greater Katanga area and throughout the DRC – so much that it remains a model for several Pentecostal and other churches across the DRC. Currently, one of the largest communities founded by CEM is the 30th CPCO<sup>1</sup> with over 9000 local churches and 5 million members<sup>2</sup> throughout the DRC and beyond. As Asamoah-Gyadu (2013:17) argues, Pentecostal worship activities should be grounded in the concrete experience of the Holy Spirit which includes the manifestations of spiritual revelations, prophecies, healing, deliverance, corporate praise and other acts interpreted as emanating from the Holy Spirit. In this regard, the core of the CEM's remarkable development is attributable to the evidence of the 'charismatic experience' in the mission. However, despite the instrumental role of the charismatic phenomenon to the mission's identity, its increasing prioritisation has instigated the incorporation of some questionable practices in the churches founded by the CEM, which are not explicitly grounded on biblical principles.

Against this background, this study examines the challenges faced by the CEM churches towards the improvement of the praxis of charismatic gifts and the charismatic experience. The research focuses on the charismatic experiences within the churches founded by the CEM. To achieve its objective, this article examines some practices pertaining to the charismatic phenomenon including deliverance, divine healing and the Kipema (which is a sacred place for those practices) to evaluate their impact on the Christian faith. Finally, some recommendations are proffered in this study that will help the assembly to reappraise and improve its praxis of the charismatic experience in alignment with biblical principles. Although this article is resolutely contextual (limited to the churches founded by CEM), the suggestions herein would prove indispensable to other Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches in the DRC and elsewhere.

## Pentecostalism in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: From missionaries to natives

Christianity, in general, and Pentecostalism, in particular, have experienced phenomenal growth in Africa among the followers of traditional African religions since its introduction by the early missionaries (Grebe & Fon 2006:21). It may have several meanings due to some differences in the contexts of their establishments across the continent. This means that Pentecostalism in Africa is multi-faceted and differs across cultural milieus (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:10–12).

1.The CEM is now known as the Church of Christ in Congo/30th Pentecostal Community in Congo (ECC/30th CPCO), with many splinter groups such as the Church of Christ in Congo/45th Pentecostal Community in Katanga (ECC/45th CPK), *Communauté Pentecôtiste au Nord du Katanga* (CPNK), and a minority of Assemblies of God Churches in Katanga.

2.Statistics updated – August 2021.

As pointed out above, the CEM was established in 1915 by William F.P. Burton and James Salter in Mwanza in Katanga as the first Pentecostal movement in the DRC (Emmett 2016). The second mission is situated in Isiro and founded by J. Blakeney; the third is situated in Kashekebwe/Uvira, and the fourth in Kinshasa. These early Pentecostal movements are rooted in the fundamental principles of Pentecostalism, which commenced on 09 April 1906 at 312 Azusa Street in Los Angeles, California, and spread across North America and Europe in the early 20th century (Bondo, Kanonge & Kommers 2020:2; Garrard 2008:1). In this vast country, it must be kept in mind that Pentecostal charismatic practices that can be prevalent in one part of the country, could be unknown elsewhere.

Historically, the Congolese people believe in the coexistence of supernatural, psychic and invisible powers with human beings (Tempels 1965:33). For example, when a person experiences persistent unhappiness, incurable diseases (epilepsy and others), sterility (male or female) or generational curses, they seek help from the custodians of these powers (Petit 2000:147–150, 155). However, on their arrival in the DRC, the CEM missionaries had brought a theology that seemed to be practiced by those of the Early Church regarding the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They encouraged the natives to renounce their traditional practices and beliefs, which were considered superstitious (Garrard 2017:56). The missionaries led the natives to an understanding of the sovereignty of Jesus Christ above the powers and forces that subjected them to a life of fear. From the same source, the biblical message provided a complete and qualitatively superior alternative to traditional people's solutions. In other words, the proclamation of the gospel led the people to understand the supremacy of God's power, delivered them from evil strongholds, and gave them a sense of safety and peace amidst the hostility of their lived realities. Accordingly, the CEM missionaries adopted an approach that accentuated the charismatic experiences whilst acknowledging the cultural realities of the native people of the DRC (Burton 1967); thus assuming an African approach to its theology. As is the case with many contemporary Pentecostalism across Africa, the mission's adoption of a pneumatological approach takes cognisance of the communities' issues such as socio-political conditions, suffering, disease, and other spiritual issues (e.g. demonic possession, witchcraft, etc.) (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:49). Therefore, the charismatic phenomenon presented a glimmer of hope and optimism that equips believers with the fortitude to face the challenges and difficulties in their lives (Jeannerat 2009:254–255). Presently, this is no longer the case, as those who claim to exercise the charismatic gifts utilise them to instil fear in the members' lives. In doing so, they diminish believers' confidence in Christ, who is the author of every charismatic gift, including healing and deliverance. Furthermore, they amplify the feeling of reliance on physical substances (ransom, anointing oil, water).

## Research methods and design

As this research focused on charismatic experiences, a choice for the qualitative method was made. The qualitative method was mainly based on an empirical investigation, which was supplemented by a literature study on the focus points that

emerged from the empirical investigation. Data was collected through in-depth (semi-structured) interviews and direct observation during worship services to evaluate these prevalent practices relating to the charismatic phenomenon such as deliverance and divine healings in the churches founded by the CEM. A simple random sampling design was utilised, because it closely approximates the ideals of probability sampling (Berg 2001:31).

To achieve this simple sample, it was essential to start with a list of the elements under study (Berg 2001:30). Each element of the entire population (members, pastors and prophets) had an equal and independent chance of being included in the final sample for the study (Rabiee 2004:656). As it is often difficult to predict the exact number of participants that will be included in an empirical research study (Benner 1994), the following number of participants was essential, as there was data redundancy: 59 pastors, 33 prophets and 58 church members. As representative samples for the study, oral interviews were conducted in French, Kiswahili and Kiluba (local languages) for data collection, and the data was recorded. It was easier to gather the relevant information on the praxis of the gifts of the Holy Spirit within the designated churches. The interviews took between 20 and 30 min and were conducted in an ethical manner devoid of sensitive questions.

This research focused on charismatic experiences in the CEM churches. Specifically, it examines some of the charismatic practices, including deliverance, divine healing and the concept of Kipema as a sacred meeting place. The purpose of this study was to establish the extent to which these churches can move away from these practices and find in Christ the better life they seek. The empirical results of the interviews and observations were assessed to establish viable guidelines towards the efficient praxis of the charismata in Pentecostal churches in the DRC. For the data evaluation process, the study followed the recommendation of Creswell (2003:190). The conclusion shows that the spread of praxis abuses is largely due to ignorance and neglect of the church's doctrines, particularly pneumatology (Pentecostal doctrine), even though the teaching of this doctrine has provided the Pentecostal theological context for the mission's foundation since its inception. In addition, the divisions within the CEM churches have become more frequent and thereby making it difficult for many pastors to lead their members, especially those with charismatic gifts.

It is worth noting that the research followed a path of inductive reasoning, which starts with specific facts and ends with a general conclusion. This means that the conclusions drawn would also be valid for other local congregations in the area.

## Charismatic experiences: Deliverance and divine healing practices

The spiritual issues of possession and deliverance are prevalent in many cultures and form an integral aspect of

diverse worldviews and traditional religious histories (Kalu 2003:85). They are not restricted to the New Testament or the ancient world of the Eastern Mediterranean; they exist in various cultures and vary depending on the context (Keener 2010:3). Thus, it is worth bearing in mind that charismatic experiences conform to the patterns of the cultures in which they occur, varying across settings and myriad of cultures (Verger 1969:64).

In the DRC, for example, 58 respondent church members revealed that pastors and prophets often resort to specific practices to address issues such as misfortunes, incurable or chronic diseases (epilepsy and others), sterility (female or male), and the death of a spouse (male or female) amongst their congregants. Hence, the following questions were posed to the respondents to ascertain their understanding of these practices: (1) What are the most common practices used by pastors and prophets for the acts of deliverance and divine healing in the church? (2) How does the applicability of these practices affect the lives of members and non-members? The replies gathered from the respondents revealed three most common practices: the deliverance practices using ransom and fire; healing by the laying of hands and anointing oil; and the concept of Kipema. These practices and their contextual applicability will be briefly discussed in the sections that follow.

## Ransom and fire as deliverance practices

The performance of deliverance using ransom and fire (or hot water) is a pervasive contemporary practice within the context of Pentecostal churches in DRC. In the Congolese traditional religion, the use of ransom is particularly used as a spiritual remedy. Deliverance by ransom is often employed in dire circumstances. According to participants of this study, the ransom paid following repeated deaths in a family has a very practical function because it serves an important objective: 'I give you so that you remove the stigma' (participant: Mulongo, August 2017). In other words, the payment of the ransom is performed as an act of appeasement (*Kolola mula*).

In the *mise en scene* of the exorcist prophets, the power of deliverance and healing stems from the understanding and extensive background of the traditional religion. The ransom offerings are widely performed by diviners and traditional healers in the DRC and anywhere their services are required. They refer to the practice as *lupeto lwa kumitwe* [money for spirits]. For the exorcist prophets, these offerings (as ransom) are traditionally known as *kitapwa kya mingilo, sadaka ya butumishi* [sacrifice of service – freely translated]. It requires loyalty and, in cases where the desired results are not attained, the blame is often attributed to the family's inadequacy in the offering. Based on these similarities with traditional healer practices, it is argued that the infiltration of these elements into the church's charismatic practices is simply retrogressive. This is because it reintroduces Christians to the same acts that they are required to renounce,

albeit being presented in a new form (Meyer 2004:455). Yet, the apostle Paul anticipated those notable charismatic phenomena in Christian communities (1 Cor 12:9–11, 28–30; Gl 3:5). He emphasised the importance of discernment, and distinguished the church from the other communities of synagogues and religious associations of antiquity such as the temples of Asclepius where acts of healing were also performed (Elwell & Comfort 2001:1011). Although these practices that influence their theologies are an imitation of the practices of mediums in traditional societies, some people are healed and sometimes non-Christians who heal are converted and join the churches.

The practice of deliverance using fire is another prevalent practice in Pentecostal communities. This practice replicates the traditional religious practices of *Mwavi*<sup>3</sup> amongst the Baluba, and *Kitopolo* [punishment of sorcerers] amongst the Bazela respectively. *Mwavi* is often used by diviners to detect sorcerers and thieves. It involves the process of placing an axe over a fire while the specialist healer checks for the accurate heat level (Burton 1961:68–69). When the axe becomes hot enough, the specialist instructs the accused to lick the extremely hot axe several times (two or three times). If the accused's tongues remain unscathed, it signifies their innocence, and their relatives ululate loudly in proclamation of their exoneration. Contrarily, if the accused's tongues scalded, it signifies that they are guilty as charged. In a similar vein, one participant at an exorcism group in Lubumbashi (April 2017) revealed that, prior to deliverance sessions, suspected witches were first interrogated to ascertain whether they were aware of the charges. If suspected witches do not re-know the act for which they are accused, the exorcist can order boiling water to be poured over them, or throw fire on their bodies. This practice is meant to persuade the suspected witches to release the victims or to renounce witchcraft (Fancello 2008:167). This barbaric practice accounts for the unjustified brutalisation of thousands of women and children, who are unfoundedly accused of witchcraft or sorcery under the pretext of spiritual deliverance or exorcism (using fire) (Witch child documentary 2011). The firing practice seems to be a replication of traditional religion, because it is not different from *Mwavi* amongst the Baluba and *Kitopolo* amongst the Bazela – whereas the scriptural prescription lets us know that it is powerful statements in prayer before the presence of God that can rebuke all ungodly imaginations, including magicians (Ac 13:9–11).

The adoption of these deliverance practices using ransom, fire or hot water for alleged witches and for divine healing in Pentecostal churches in the DRC, is contextually incompatible with the missiological agenda of the church. This is problematic, because it does not only imply a dualism between the gospel and culture (traditional religions). However, through such homologies one can also undoubtedly

assert that the true crux of Pentecostalism is becoming eroded and rapidly replaced by elements of African traditional religion (Ilunga Kazembe: a participant and leader of the CEM, August 2017). Therefore, these practices, which are clearly associated mysticism and were previously renounced by the apostles (Ac 8:9; 13:6–8), the early missionaries and the native pioneers; are now being reinstated. The implication is that the essence of Christ's redemption is lost, while the quest for deliverance practices for a variety of daily needs is prioritised above salvation. This makes the proclamation of Christ's redemptive work even more pertinent in this era (Post 2013:112). While some practices can be used to refer to contextualisation, they must be scrutinised before they are put into practice, as the acceptance of the dualism within the churches underpins the unmistakable shift to extremely anaemic pneumatology.

## Divine healing: Laying of hands and anointing oil practices

Divine healing refers to the restoration of physical and spiritual health through prayer. In the context of Pentecostalism in the DRC, particularly within CEM-founded churches, divine healing through the laying of hands and the anointing of oil are contemporary practices (Garrard 2017:62; Womersley n.d.:28). Members deeply believe in the concept of divine healing through anointing with oil and the laying of hands by pastors, elders or other members of the mission who have manifested the gift of healing. This is not surprising, as the use of oil anointing for divine healing has proven effective from biblical times (Cooper 2000:110). For example, the apostle James encouraged the presbyters (elders) to unite and perform ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι (τοῦ) κυρίου [anointing] with firm belief and trust in Jesus' name. Therefore, divine healing is indisputably one of the most widely accepted and beneficial gifts to humankind.

However, the methods through which the charismata such as the laying of hands and the anointing of the sick is currently performed by pastors and prophets in the CEM churches remains extremely controversial and disputed. For some believers, the laying of hands on the sick symbolises a physical act of taking authority over the disease; hence, the hands should ideally be placed on the head of the sick (the position of missionaries and native pioneers) for holistic and integral healing. Whereas for others, the hands should be laid directly on the physical site of the disease as was the case during the healing of the blind man in the Bible (Mk 8:23–25). The argument is that, by laying hands upon the specific site of the disease, the healing power is directly transmitted, and the effects are instantaneous. However, the problem with this method is that, because the laying of hands and the anointing with oil (e.g. the oil extracted from Mpafu tree)<sup>4</sup> must be performed at the site of the physical anomaly, some unscrupulous pastors who adopt this method boldly anoint the genitals of barren women under the guise

3. *Mwavi* is the name of a tree that grows along riverbanks. It also has a secondary meaning as the act of 'testing poison'. *Mwavi* comprises *Mwavi wa mema a saluka* [boiling water test], *Mwavi wa kalonda mu diso* [test with a burning piece of metal in the eye], *Mwavi wa kalala buto* [test with burning ash], and *Mwavi wa kasolwa ka mudjilo* [test with burning ash; test by burning axe].

4. Mpafu is a tree whose fruits produce oil. This oil is a potent natural remedy for joint pains, stomach aches, and sexual health problems. It is widely used by traditional healers (participant: Kabondo Dianda, September 2017).

of divine healing.<sup>5</sup> The sensuality of the act of genital anointing, more often than not, transcends into lust and such pastors engage in sexual immorality with the desperate women who they convince to sleep with them as a divine order to activate their conception (participant: Ngandu Mpiana François, March 2018).

When a specific oil from Mpafu is used for the anointing, it becomes a combination of the two religious worldviews (the traditional and the biblical). As the act of anointing the sites of illness is the same mode of healing employed by the traditional healers, it is crucial to re-evaluate existing biblical sources and judiciously deviate from the utilisation of all the structures of false religions and occultic practices of the past. This raises a pertinent concern about the blurring of boundaries in the ministry of healing and deliverance whereby Christians are more susceptible to backsliding to the practices from which they have been delivered. If such practices were intricately interwoven into the church's primitive character, certainly, it would be difficult to see any objections (ed. Spence-Jones 1909:700–711).

As previously mentioned, the integration of practices such as ransom, fire and anointing oil into the contemporary praxis of the charismatic phenomenon in the CEM, undoubtedly reflect an unguarded proclivity towards idolatrous practices. This is particularly worrisome, because the missionaries and early native pastors vigorously interrogated and pre-empted the unquestioned integration of elements of traditional religious practices into the ethos of the mission. They emphasised that it was not within the power of men to deliver and heal, but by the power of the living Christ who responds to the demands of his people through the sufficiency of his grace and mercy (Ilunga Kazembe: participant, August 2017).

## Kipema: The sacred therapeutic place

Another pervasive practice pertains to the concept of Kipema [tent or camp], which was first used by a renowned prophetess named Adishi Mbolela<sup>6</sup> (or Eseta) around 1968 as a means of providing her sick guests with a conducive environment for healing practice. Adishi built a camp where she kept the sick until they recovered (Garrard 2008:20). Although the Kipema was originally devised as a therapeutic space for the sick, its conceptualisation has changed over time.

The Kipema tradition has certainly generated a remarkable sense of trust amongst the population. According to several observations and testimonies from respondents, Kipema serves as the sacred place for deliverance, divine healing and the exorcism of demonic spirits. Similarly, as a participant from Malemba Nkulu (July 2017) reveals, members who desire liberty from the threats of demonic

5. Precisely one in Maka (in the Bukama territory); the two others respectively in Kijuki (Manono territory) and in Lubumbashi.

6. A prophetess from Musau village in Malemba Nkulu territory was known for her healing ministry (1967–1977) (Ilunga Kazembe: participant, August 2017).

oppression and witchcraft would ideally choose the more powerful Kipema and strictly adhere to the instructions of the guarantor (prophet or pastor). Contrary to the original purpose, Kipema became an ideal space for the resolution of spiritual problems concerning possession and divine healing.

To further expatiate the idea of God's presence in his word and amongst his people, it is crucial to examine some viewpoints recorded in this regard. For instance, the theophanic episode in the Old Testament (see Ex 19) necessitated the construction of a sacred space for the people to encounter God. This explains why the instructions to build the tabernacle were given shortly after the terrifying presence of God at Mount Sinai (see Ex 25:8). In the New Testament, the circumstance changes whereby the Christian community becomes the place of the divine presence, and the Word of God represents the sacred space and source of life (Kupp 2005:1–2). This reflection embodies the ideological stance of the CEM missionaries. The founding missionaries emphasised the significance of the word as not just a behavioural guide, but also as a fulcrum of the divine presence, an active and permanent source of enlightenment whose proactive implementation enables the maintenance of the community (Robinson n.d.:7). They posited that, through the obedience to the Word, members would experience the existence and presence of Jesus in their midst through the Comforter (Jn 14:16). This indicates that the implementation of the Word within the community of believers would indisputably evince the divine presence amongst the members.

The Gospel of Matthew (28:20) asserts the rhetorical context of Christ's perpetual presence amongst the community of believers. Mark (14:28; 16:14) reinforces this notion by affirming the divine presence of God as an eternal shepherd through the risen Christ. He presents Jesus as being divinely present and active amongst the believers. Luke further emphasises the fact that, even though Christ physically departs from the disciples (Lk 24:51; Ac 1:2, 9–11–14), he remains actively present through the power of his name and the Holy Spirit. Similarly, and albeit being accused of blaspheming the earthly temple built with human hands, Stephen professes in his speech (Ac 7:48–50) that God would not be confined to a house built by men (Polhill 1992:202–204); that is. He reiterates the words of Prophet Isaiah (66:1–2), by asserting that the entirety of creation in all its vastness belongs to God, and in his omniscience, he dwells above them. Therefore, the presence of God cannot be restricted to houses or places built by men. Stephen further admonishes the comparison of human work with that of the Creator. He reprimands the council members for their delusion of stiff-neckedness, calling them the uncircumcised in heart and ears, and opposers of the Holy Spirit (Lange et al. 2008: 130–131). By repeating this prophetic passage from Isaiah, Stephen explicitly establishes the touchstone for the perception of places of worship and the divine presence.

For the apostle Paul, believers are the holy 'Temple of God', inhabited by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16). Paul speaks of the dwelling of the Holy Spirit amongst believers as the animating presence of God within the Christian congregation. In this sense, the Christian congregation (community of saints) is no longer a mere building belonging to God (1 Cor 3:9), but the actual dwelling place of God himself where the power of his presence is experienced (1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16). Paul's assertion is better explained in the second part of the question: *καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ Θεοῦ οἰκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν*; (*kai to pneuma tou Theou oichei en humin*); and the Spirit of God dwells 'in you' (1 Cor 3:16), that is within the corporeal being. The expression, *In you*, denotes the visceral presence of God manifesting works of love through the Holy Spirit. What this implies is that the divine presence is no longer manifested through worship in the tabernacle or the temple in Jerusalem (Jn 4:23–26) as it was in the past, but through the presence of the Holy Spirit within the community of Christ, which is the church (Kupp 2005:1).

The church must recognise that the incorporation of the Kipema constitutes a hindrance to the progress of the Christian faith, because it deviates the foci of believers from God to an obsession with preacher-idolatry. In Kipema, there are rituals and symbolic activities that function as a bridge between the pastors or prophets and the sick as in Kipao of the traditional healer (diviner) (Bondo 2020:165). The ministry focuses on the prophet (or pastor) who is exalted as the source of the desired healing and the one on whom the success thereof depends. This undermines the New Testament's emphasis on the multiplicity of gifts and ministries in the church (Rm 12:4–8), especially because, in the Kipema, the prophet or pastor abrogates the free choice or action of the believers arrogating all powers to themselves. As the concept of the priesthood of all believers (1 Pt 2:5, 9) is completely absent, the Kipema becomes a safe place, and the leader of the organisation is regarded not only as the overseer, but also as the supreme source to all deliverance and protection. Despite the prevalence of this doctrinal confusion amongst the clergy, a substantial number of the pastors and servants interviewed for this study, strongly argue that the ministry requires the Holy Spirit only.

## Findings of this study

Until now, the churches founded by the CEM continue to strive towards the perpetuation of the charismatic phenomenon. However, the presence of all these practices is a hindrance to the progress of the Christian faith that should be making its way amongst this population. Even though charismatic gifts are multidimensional by nature, their diversity is limited by those who exercise them, as they do not offer a transparent and inclusive experience (Duncan 2014:8). Due to factors such as the lack of doctrinal knowledge and internal schisms, pastors and church leaders struggle to desist from some practices that contravene the apostolic principles of Christianity, or clearly deviate from the fundamental doctrines of the CEM. The present state of the church's spirituality seems to deviate from the scriptural principles regarding charismatic experiences (Garrard 2009:241).

## Lack of doctrinal knowledge

Evidently, several leaders of the CEM, particularly the native pastors, have not received adequate formal training from biblical or theological institutions. During this research, it was observed that many pastors ascend to positions of church leadership after merely serving for several years as deacons or elders, or even as missionaries' household workers. This means that biblical or theological training has not been a prerequisite for becoming a minister; one only has to demonstrate God's grace (everyone is welcome to the pulpit). In these churches, teaching and preaching are not exclusive roles executed by the pastor of the church; it is a calling open to everyone provided the speaker shares the grace of God within them (through the charismatic phenomena). As a result, this further implies that even amongst those who claim to be knowledgeable about the Bible, full theological understanding of the concept of Pentecostalism is extremely limited (Garrard 2009:231–244). Yet, training gives a new and valid understanding (implied) form, adapted to the purpose. Through training, one develops the aptitude, qualities, character and discipline to exercise the ministry (Kuen 2000:33).

The proliferation of Pentecostal doctrinal abuses exists largely due to ignorance about and negligence of the church's doctrines, especially their pneumatology (Pentecostal doctrine). It remains crucial to note that the emergence of these traditionalist practices in the churches founded by the CEM has inadvertently led to a disregard for in-depth biblical and theological training and eventually resulted in the further diminishment of the essence of Pentecostal doctrine and the Christian faith. This is despite the fact that the teaching of this doctrine has provided the Pentecostal theological context for the foundation of the mission from its inception. Furthermore, it has enabled the expression and exercise of the charismatic gifts in unity as evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit (Tinney 1976:34) within the church.

## Divisions and schism

The divisions within the CEM churches exist under two broad categories. The first pertains to members who deliberately exit from the churches and thereby renouncing the rights and duties of membership. These members who have renounced or are currently renouncing their role in the CEM churches often proceed to establish independent churches that do not belong to the mission's association (CEM). The second category comprises those who are focused to withdraw from the church due to diverse issues such as discontent regarding the ethos of the mission or suspicion of mismanagement by the pastors. This group sometimes chooses to remain members of the CEM even after establishing their own churches. In these churches, the division is sometimes considered a missiological concept and a propelling factor in the growth of the church. Nevertheless, even though it may produce missiological facts, the divisions in the church are counter-productive to its vocation of uniting people under the body of Christ (Albrecht 1999). This is because the reasons for these schisms amongst Christians are

more often than not based on petty and perilous pretexts, which are less profound than the upholding of the faith and the mission of the church (Shaw 1915:715). One can aptly argue that these divisions disintegrate the unity of the Body of Christ and have far-reaching consequences for the faith of believers. For instance, those who detach and remain under the auspices of the CEM often develop a sense of triumphalism. This contradicts the principles of the Holy Spirit, as the Holy Spirit does not lead to triumphalism, but exalts in the triumph of Christ, even amidst things that others reject or avoid as signs of weakness and powerlessness (1 Cor 1:25; 2:3; 9:22).

Sadly, these divisions have become more frequent and thereby making it difficult for many pastors to lead their members, especially those with charismatic gifts (prophets, Balombi). Given that acts of divine healing and the performance of other charismatic gifts attracts new members to the church, pastors have lost their sense of authority, as their leadership strategies are remarkably influenced by the *modus operandi* of the prophets. Due to the high privileges bestowed on those who manifest charismatic gifts, leaders (pastors) are forced to relinquish some of their administrative control. Subsequently, this leads to the unquestioned infiltration of unchristian practices to the praxis of charismatic gifts in the churches.

## Guidelines for addressing these practices

Unarguably, the baptism in the Holy Spirit with its attendant charismatic phenomena forms the fulcrum of Pentecostalism (Hocken 1976:65). The perpetuation of the essence of Pentecostalism in contemporary Christendom can only be achieved by ensuring that the clergy (pastors, ministers, and prophets, etc.) are enlightened about the fundamental principles of the Christian mission, specifically by undergoing biblical or theological training at formal theological institutions. Alternatively, considering that some pastors or prophets are old, and others do not seem to have the intellectual capacity for formal theological education, mandatory informal theological training should be provided in manageable groups at church district or station levels.

In the CEM's churches, the mission is both the right and the responsibility of every believer. This means the power of the Holy Spirit is available to every believer, and church planting is their responsibility. Even if the ideal is sometimes not achieved, the mindset persists. That is why the CEM's planting church's practical cycle is included in the spiritual or charismatic experience. It is in this context that those who exercise spiritual gifts, take advantage of breaking away and creating churches. Although this way of church planting sometimes creates disputes, division and schism remain the most frequent modes. Consistent with the above, other pastors estimate that this mode of church planting is certainly not the ideal form of church growth, especially as it has several consequences for the unity and faith of the members.

Moreover, it reveals the unscrupulous and self-aggrandising nature of the pastors and prophets who advance this disintegration, as the apostle Paul identifies it as one of the fruits of the flesh (Gl 5:19–20). Such derailing ministers must be conscientised to pursue the traditional ideals of church planting, especially the proclamation of the gospel to unbelievers and the advancement of the kingdom of God (Sills 2015:13).

Given that the churches founded by CEM are distinguished in the DRC by their espousal of the charismatic phenomenon and continue to demonstrate a strong current of Pentecostalism, it is pertinent to re-evaluate the mission's teachings and understanding of the charismatic experience so that its praxis is grounded on biblical principles (cf. Lk 24:49; Ac 1:4–8; 2:1–4). By doing so, they would focus on the essence of the mission and desist from creating irreparable divisions, which not only negatively affect the structure of the church, but also have devastating effects on the faith of other believers.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to evaluate some contemporary practices relating to the charismatic phenomenon in the churches of the CEM. As the foregoing discussions have demonstrated, the charismatic gifts are active and continue to play a significant role in the advancement of the several churches established by the CEM in the DRC. On their part, these churches strive to prioritise the Holy Scriptures and to emphasise the dialogical interaction between the Bible and charismatic experiences (the baptism in the Holy Spirit and charismatic phenomena). The crux of the CEM's mission hinges on spirituality and the praxis of charismatic experiences such as deliverance and divine healing, however concerted efforts must be made by the mission's leadership, to critically pre-empt the uncensored infiltration of traditional religious practices into the church. There are indisputable similarities between the deliverance and healing practices conducted in the church and those performed within the African traditional religions as well as a kind of catharsis achieved through these ministries.

This intermingling with traditional religious practices determines the possible existence of dualism which is detrimental to the Pentecostal pneumatology. This could prompt one to ask why the pastors of Pentecostal churches consistently apply these elements of traditionalism into the deliverance practices of their members. As the discussions in this study has shown, this could be attributed to either the existence of divisions in the CEM or the members' lack of in-depth knowledge regarding the Pentecostal doctrine. As most of the practices (rituals) in the churches are adopted from traditional religions and familiar to the members, they naively believe them. Thus, it is essential to conscientise pastors and members who manifest charismatic gifts to acquire the necessary knowledge of Pentecostal doctrine and to maintain the traditional agenda of Christian evangelism.

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## Author's contributions

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