Unity and Diversity within African Pentecostalism
A Comparison of the Christianities of Daniel Olukoya and David Oyedepo

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E.P. Thompson remarked of early British Methodism: “Too much writing on Methodism commences with the assumption that we all know what Methodism was, and gets on with discussing its growth-rates or its organizational structures” (1963:93). Sometimes I think the same is true for African Pentecostalism. Many simply assume we all know what we are dealing with, and move immediately to speculate on political effects, social roles, statistical trends. I want to address this lack here, by focusing on two major African Pentecostal churches, with the aim of uncovering precisely what their Christianity is. The two churches are Daniel Olukoya’s Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFM) and David Oyedepo’s Living Faith World Outreach, more popularly known as Winners’ Chapel.

Olukoya founded the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, in Lagos, in 1989.1 The church claims that its regular Sunday attendance of 100,000 at its headquarters in Lagos makes it the largest single congregation in Africa. It has spread widely, even outside Africa. Its founder has promoted his Christianity in over 100 books (113 are listed on his home page in May 2012). I do not claim to have read all Olukoya’s literature (most books are out of print), but over the last twenty years it is one of the churches in which I have taken a special interest. The following treatment of his particular vision of Christianity is based on his literature, the internet and attendance at his church services in Nigeria, Ghana, and London.

Our second church is David Oyedepo’s Winners’ Chapel.2 He began the church in Lagos in 1983, and by 2012 it had spread to 65 countries, with over 400 branches in Nigeria alone, and boasting in Lagos the biggest auditorium in the world, seating 50,400, and in Nairobi the biggest church in East Africa. He too is a prolific publisher (his churches always have four “books of the month”). Again, I make no claim to have read them all, but I have read a great many, and over the last 20 years have attended Winners’ services in various

1 I have discussed Olukoya in Gifford 2013a and 2013b.
2 I have discussed Oyedepo in Gifford 2004 (especially 56–61), 2009 (especially 121–125); 2011a, 2011b and in Gifford and Nogueira-Godsey (2011).
African countries and seen a good many more on television, and regularly resorted to his online material. In what follows I will draw on all this.

For the most part, I have tried to let them speak for themselves, and in the case of Oyedepo I have also used the testimonies of his followers. To the best of my ability I have not skewed the data to suit my purposes, “excerpted” fragments from a wider canvas, or excluded material unsuitable for my case. How successful I have been I leave to others to judge. To be perfectly clear, I am interested here in describing what exactly the Christianity of each church consists in; so the supply side, rather than the demand. I am not concerned with what adherents make of it, although I doubt if the demand is significantly different from the supply – adherents attend precisely because what is offered so closely suits their demands – but I have not the space here to elaborate that further.

Also beyond the scope of this chapter is the question of how representative of African Pentecostalism these two churches are, although they are both among the most successful on the continent, evident in their size and spread. Suffice it to say that their very success has made them almost paradigmatic, models imitated by others, and their influence extends widely through media productions, both books and television.

Daniel Olukoya, Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries

Olukoya teaches that all Christians have a glorious destiny here in this world. This destiny is given us by God. But all are prey to spiritual forces determined to destroy this destiny. Such spiritual forces are continually called “destiny arresters,” “destiny padlocks,” calculated to bring about “destiny stagnation,” “destiny pollution,” “destiny demotion,” or “destiny transfer”; it is Olykoya’s special anointing to overcome all these harmful evil forces.

The spiritual force most frequently mentioned is witchcraft, the exercise of supernatural powers by people who are in league with the devil, through manipulation, even with the use of satanic weapons. One becomes a witch either by inheritance (often through one’s witch-mother), through a personal decision (perhaps to obtain great wealth), by force (some are simply not strong enough to resist initiation), but many are unaware they are witches (“blind witches”), either because they think their nocturnal activities are simply dreams, or because they have been unconsciously ensnared through sex with witchcraft agents.

The signs of being bewitched are any denial of your divine destiny: being “almost there” but never arriving; the discovery on moving to a new place that