

THE hall was nearly filled to capacity with thousands of people, mostly Nigerians, assembled together to praise God. People had traveled from far and wide for the joyous occasion, an opportunity for renewal and healing, for fellowship and worship.

The popular Nigerian choruses of the day were booming up to the rafters. Pastor after pastor spoke and prayed and all the while those assembled waited earnestly for one of the most dynamic church leaders in Nigeria and all of Africa, Pastor Adeboye, General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, (RCCG) to speak. It was already late in the night, but the worship was still far from winding down.

Certainly this must have been Lagos or Ibadan, or some other big city in Nigeria? Far from it. The occasion I am describing took place last week in far away Washington DC.

From June 21st to June 23rd 2000, the RCCG held their 4th Annual North American Convention in Washington DC. The three day event was hosted by the five RCCG parishes in the Washington area and was attended by RCCG members from all over the United States, Canada, some coming from as far away as Europe to participate. The convention drew revival pastors from all over North America, as well as many from Nigeria itself.

Yemi Adamolekun, a member of Jesus House DC and a key member of the convention planning committee, commented that the annual event has rotated between various cities in the United States.

Revive us again

"In the year 2000," she noted, "it was important to have the event in Washington DC, the nation's capital, so that we could impact the city for the new millennium."

The highlight of the event was the service I described in the opening paragraph - the Holy Ghost Service that commenced at 8pm on Friday evening and continued well into the next morning. The special service was consciously modeled after the RCCG Holy Ghost Services held monthly in Lagos as well as the Festival of Lights held in London every three months. Although the numbers of people present at the Washington DC service did not nearly reach the usual turnout of these other services, the level of attendance was still impressive.

Bola Baoku, an RCCG member who had traveled all the way from Dallas for the event, said, "This is the first Holy Ghost Night in the United States, and a lot of people have come to witness it. People came from Canada and all over the United States, and we hope that this will start happening every other month."

In response to a question regarding the nationality of those in attendance, Baoku responded, "We are here to invite people of all nations, we are here for everybody. In fact, there is an RCCG parish in Tennessee that is 90% American!"

Tokunbo Lawal, an attendee from nearby Virginia, commented, "This is like

Wiebe Boer
Perspective of a Nigerian-American



Holy Ghost Night at home, it feels just like Nigeria." Then she added, "It is uplifting to hear American pastors who have heard about the great leaders of Nigerian Christianity coming to minister to us."

One American pastor present, the Rev. Bart Pierce of Rock City Church, Baltimore, told all those assembled that he had heard of the masses that Pastor Adeboye spoke to in Lagos, and had been really looking forward to speaking at the same event as the General Overseer.



•Adeboye

Rev. Pierce went on to say, "I wanted to speak before the

General Overseer did so that any mistakes I make could be corrected by him later." The symbolism of the statement was rich.

That a white American preacher would be paying such respect to a Nigerian pastor in the United States exhibits the extent to which the authority and spiritual centre of World Christianity has changed in the last few decades.

So what are we to make of such an event? Should we marvel at the international fame of Pastor Adeboye? Should we be thankful that here is an arena where Nigeria's international reputation is positive and growing daily?

Should we praise Nigerians in the Washington DC area for their ability to organize such a big event? Should we see it as an ex-

ample of the unity and spirituality of Nigerians abroad? Perhaps, but I believe there is a more important lesson to be learned from all of this.

Nigeria is a deeply religious country. Based on certain statistics, it is the most religious country in the world. Furthermore, Nigeria is the only country in the world where so many millions from the world's two major missionary faiths live side by side within the same borders.

One might expect then, based on the general religiosity of the populace, and the fact that two major faiths are competing for national respect, that Nigeria should be a marvel of a country for all the world to see. A bastion of virtuous government and God fearing rulers and citizens. Unfortunately, however, as we well know, Nigeria is also one of the most corrupt countries in the world.

As this story shows, Nigerian Christianity is having a great impact internationally. As it also exhibits, Christianity is so dear to such a significant number of Nigerians that even years after leaving home and living in the midst of a secularizing society they will travel great distances to gather for worship. Since this seems to be the case, then why does the message of Christianity have such a minimal impact on public life in Nigeria?

Let me end with a challenge for Nigeria's Christians, just as last week I ended with a challenge for Nigeria's Muslims. At present, it appears as though the most public aspects of Christianity that are booming in Nigeria are exhibited through endless revivals, prayer meetings, and Bible studies.

While commendable, Christianity is not about putting on public displays of piety, it is about surrender, putting others before yourself, and God above all.

Christians should not be focused on putting on big shows, but on the constant pursuit of justice, concern for ones neighbours (no matter their status or relation to you), and consistent adherence to the moral higher ground in every facet of life. With such an approach from Christians nationwide, Nigeria itself might actually be revived.

Correction

The Scandinavian country with the Muslim member of parliament referred to in last week's piece is Sweden, not Denmark.

PUBLIC NOTICE

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The public is hereby notified that the above named Diocese of The Church of Nigeria, (Anglican Communion) has applied to the Corporate Affairs Commission for registration under Part C of the Companies and Allied Matters Act, 1990.

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