Schisms within Congolese Pentecostalism
Towards a Biblical Response

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Abstract

Major upheavals in Christianity, such as the reformation and various revival move-
ments, have been characterised by schisms—a reality that also extends to the
Pentecostal movement in the Congo. The increase of splits and division among
churches that hold to a high view of the Spirit, in the Congolese context, has become
a great concern for both Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal Christians. In this paper,
the sacerdotal prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ (John 17) and the communal life of the
first Pentecostal congregation (Acts 2) serve as the bases for developing a biblical
response to the challenge of schisms among Pentecostal/Charismatic churches
in Lubumbashi, Congo. This paper demonstrates some of the causes behind the
schisms in both the biblical (1 Corinthians 1 and 3) and Congolese contexts, while
underlining a biblical response to this continuous malaise. It employs Osmer's
(2008) model as a framework of reflection. Coming from an insider's perspective,
this paper contributes to the conversation around denominational schisms within
the Pentecostal churches in both central and southern Africa.

Key words: schisms, division, charismatic, Pentecostal, Spirit, unity, CEM,
           DR Congo, Katanga

1. Introduction

Writing this paper came as a result of four influences. The first is the researcher's
experience as a researcher in Pentecostal studies. During both his master's and
doctoral programmes in theology, the researcher had the privilege of conducting
empirical research around classical Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. What
drew his attention as a researcher was the increased number of cases of breaka-
ways in the church he was investigating.

Second, being a Pentecostal minister for more than twenty years has given the
researcher first-hand experience when it comes to splits within the church. For in-
stance, several pastors the researcher served with under the same church denomi-
nation left to start their own churches or ministries. These churches and ministries
subsequently experienced breakaways. Considering this, one wonders if schisms
have become a blessing or a curse for Pentecostal believers.

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Third, giving an insider's view or examination of what is happening within Pentecostal groups with regards to splits inspired this paper. Several people have critiqued the churches with a high view of the Spirit, without adequately reflecting on the positive realities that transpire within such churches. Therefore, this paper is an attempt to encourage more discussions on this important subject, a matter that has both a positive and negative impact on the global Pentecostal movement and how it is perceived.

Lastly, the exponential increase in the number of Pentecostal/Charismatic churches in Katanga region has become a great concern. This confirms Anderson's (2000:83; 20001:243) observation about the movement. He argues that "Pentecostalism as a contemporary religious movement is the fastest growing section of Christianity and one of the most extraordinary religious phenomena in the world today." For this scholar, "Pentecostalism has become a form of Christianity found in almost every country on earth and is now one of the most dominant Christian expression in Africa."

This research contends that understanding the causes behind schisms in Pentecostal churches, and how we can respond to them from a biblical perspective, could facilitate a healthier pentecostalisation process for the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo). The reflection is driven by the following questions: (a) What is the reality of schisms in Congolese Pentecostal churches? (b) Why are these Pentecostal churches experiencing schisms? (c) What does the Bible teach about schisms or breakaways and unity? (d) How should Congolese Pentecostals respond to the challenge of schisms in their context?

2. Understanding schisms

Both Orr (1970:112) and Marthaler (2003:200) understand the term schism as "a word from the Greek concept 'schisma' which means literally a split, a division." A schism refers to a separation within a church that disrupts "harmonious coordination and cooperation of the members." Ecclesiastically, a schism is marked by a break from the church organisation. Such a break "may or may not relate to a doctrinal dissent." The fact that schisms often arise as a result of not sharing the same understanding on a particular church doctrine makes Pentecostalism fertile ground for organisational rifts. Doctrinal dissent is not the only source of schisms in the church, they can also be related to insubordination and disobedience to the orders of established authorities.

Theologically speaking, there are two types of schisms—"active" and "passive." Marthaler (2003:202) understands "active" schism as deliberately detaching oneself from the body of the church, freely renouncing the right to form a part of it. He calls passive schism "the condition of those whom the church herself rejects

from her bosom by excommunication, inasmuch as they undergo this separation whether they will or not, having deserved it." With this understanding of schisms in mind, the next section investigates the reality of splits or breakaways within Congolese Pentecostalism.

3. The reality of schisms within Congolese Pentecostalism

This section attempts to respond to the first question from Osmer's (2008) model: "What is the reality of schisms in Congolese Pentecostal churches?" Before going any further, there is a need to clarify the use of the term "Congolese Pentecostalism" in this paper. Although the term can be extrapolated to encompass African Pentecostalism, in general, the researcher employs it as a means of delimiting the context he is reflecting on. In addition, the current global understanding of the word "Pentecostal" includes all other Spirit-related groups of churches, such as classical Pentecostals, Charismatics, Neo-Pentecostals, and African Initiated Churches/ African Independent Churches (AICs) (Anderson, 2001:423-428; Anderson et al., 2010:14).

While different Pentecostal church denominations have been experiencing schisms in the Congo, this paper will use the Congo Evangelistic Mission—CEM (known as 30th CPECO)—as a case study for the following reasons; 1) it is the oldest and largest Pentecostal denomination in the Great Katanga region, DR Congo (Kipimo, 2014). It was founded in 1915 by British missionaries who established their station in northern Katanga (Burton, 1967); 2) Most of the Pentecostal and charismatics churches in Katanga are offshoots from this church denomination (Kipimo, 2014). Kaondji (2009); Lumbiji (2009); and Kipimo (2014) report that CEM has gone through six major splits since its inception:

- The forty-fifth Pentecostal Evangelical community in Congo (1959) under the leadership of Rev Kayumba Ephraim (sections 4.1, 4.4 & 4.5).
- The Pentecostal community in Northern Katanga (1986), headed by Rev David Ngalula Umba Kiluba (section 4.5).
- Jesus Christ in all languages, "JTL" (1987), led by Rev Kiluba wa Kiluba (section 4.3).
- Come and see international center 1990/91), led by Bishop Matebwe Lambalamba (section 4.3).
- The New City of David, "NCD" (2001) under the vision of Bishop Albert Lukusa Luvungu (section 4.3).
- CEM—Kamina (2004), led by Rev Ndayi Martin (section 4.2).

It is worth mentioning that each of these splits have become a large church denomination with several branches within the Congo, in Africa, and beyond. The next section serves to examine some of the major reasons for all these breakaways.

4. Reasons for schisms within Congolese Pentecostalism

There are several causes behind schisms in African Christianity. Almost throughout the history of the church, there were repeated schisms that arose from differences in worship, theology, church order, and leadership (Kung, 1968:275; Kalu, 2008). To shed more light on the reasons for schisms among Spiritual oriented churches in Zimbabwe, Beta (2015:4) writes "power hunger, greed, failure to follow policies and false prophecies have high levels of effects on church splits". However, in the following paragraphs, the researcher will examine reasons for schisms in the Congolese context.

4.1 The influence of Western power

Exploring reasons behind schisms in the Congo responds to the second question from Osmer (2008): *"Why is it going on? Why are schisms taking place in Congolese Pentecostalism?"* While schisms can be ascribed to external and internal factors, the external influence of Western culture needs to be noted. Kipimo (2014:80) reports that white missionaries denied CEM members the opportunity to choose their own leaders in 1959, they imposed a leader who was not members' choice, and this led to the first breakaway in the church. Daneel (1987:195) reports that Western culture often "stimulates leadership based on ability or education." Additionally, "[t]he tribal political system with its accent on hereditary leadership and limited jurisdiction … provides insufficient scope for leadership over a broad spectrum."

The continuous influence of Western powers, especially the mother churches from the West, is a leading driver of schisms in Pentecostal churches. Anderson (2001:438) reports that "many of the secessions that took place earlier on in Western Pentecostal mission efforts in Africa and elsewhere were at least partly the result of cultural and social blunders on the part of missionaries." In Nigeria, for instance, schisms that occurred among Spirit-type of churches were as the results of African members not being pleased with the attitudes of the western missionaries (Alokan et al., 2011:366-368). The researcher agrees with the arguments above. There are several splits within African Pentecostalism due to early missionaries' influence and desire for control. Anderson (2018:33) is right to say that "Western missionaries did not only reproduce the many denominations of the West in Africa, but in several cases actually created separate denominations." The researcher observed from his ministerial experience that Western missionaries continue to exert great influence on the church to date when Christian missions have been in Congo for more than a hundred years. To encourage churches in developing nations of Africa to grow, Western missionaries should not continue to interfere with the running of churches on the continent. Hodges (1953:9) admits that "the great majority

of Pentecostals in the two-thirds world remain marginalized. They do not set the mission agenda, the rich and the powerful West does that."

The continuous presence and influence of the Western missionaries are justified by two major reasons (Kipimo, 2014). The first reason is the failure of the sending churches to acknowledge the levels of maturity in the receiving church in Congo, especially in the Spirit-type of mission churches like the CEM. There is a need to be reminded that in mission, the church passes through various stages of growth, but failure to acknowledge such growth when it is evident may also serve as an obstacle to the future of Pentecostal mission in Central and southern Africa. The researcher agrees with Anderson's comments about the indigenous church principle, citing Hodges (1953); and Anderson (2004:241), he points out that "to proceed on the assumption that the infant church in any land must always be cared for and provided for by the mother mission is an unconscious insult to the people that we endeavour to serve, and is evidence of a lack of faith in God and in the power of the Gospel."

Second, the dependence syndrome is a real setback for missions in Congo. Most Pentecostal denominations look overseas for financial and material help. Alluding to the matter under discussion, Anderson (2001:439) believes that "white missionaries keep control of the planted Pentecostal churches in Africa especially of the finances they raise in the West Europe and North America." This practice may be necessary when the church is in its infancy, but this should not become the norm, especially when the church can become self-supporting. One may argue that as long as Pentecostal churches in the Congo do not learn to support themselves financially, with resources from Africa, Occidental control will not come to an end.

4.2 The influence of African traditional customs in the church

Daneel (1987:197) points out that non-theological reasons for schisms also ought to be taken seriously. He succinctly states that "[t]he continual fragmentation of these churches reflects a characteristic typical of indigenous tribal structures, which amount to a grafting of traditional customs onto the church." Kipimo (2014:85) affirms that the appointment of the first CEM legal representative's son to take over from his father in 2004 was a key factor for the last schism in this church.

From Daneel's observation, African traditional customs in this context refer to the hereditary leadership patterns in Pentecostal churches. Sundkler (1961:117) observes that in most Pentecostal churches (like the CEM), hereditary leadership is often justified on the grounds of the Jewish monarchy or the transfer of Aaron's function to his son Eliezer (Numbers 20:22–29). As an African Pentecostal scholar, the researcher does need to query the critique of hereditary leadership patterns and its classification as an African traditional custom by Western scholars (Sund-

kler, 1961). The hereditary leadership succession style is not only an African trend whereby the son takes over from the father, or the wife takes over from the husband. This is also a biblical and Western church practice. For instance, early Pentecostal missionaries (CEM) to the Great Katanga region came from the same families. The older generations were being replaced by younger ones. Biblically speaking, this pattern can be traced to the Levitical order (Numbers 3:1-4:49), where only sons of Levi were allowed to serve as priests. The philosophy behind this trend in leadership is that God has chosen the priest and all his household or offspring. All those who belong to the priestly family are automatically part of the calling and ministry.

Hereditary leadership was also practised by Western missionaries who first came to Africa in the 18th and 19th Centuries. Not only were they themselves missionaries but even their sons and daughters also become missionaries later on. The researcher has witnessed several cases of Western Pentecostal missionaries in DR Congo, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, who have been serving on the continent from one generation to another. The researcher is of the view that Anderson (2001:435) is right when he calls for a deconstruction of presuppositions in majority world Pentecostalism where the majority of Pentecostals remain marginalised by the white missionaries from North America and the United States. These practises have escaped critique whilst their counterparts in African Pentecostal churches have often been viewed through a critical lens. There is, however, the need to evaluate the next generation of leaders against the qualifications set by Paul in 1 Timothy and Titus.

4.3 The role of an ethnically defined leadership in the church

Maurice (1950:217) shows that the Katanga region has more than twenty-three ethnic groups. The researcher has demonstrated elsewhere that 80% of the CEM branch churches are led by Baluba ministers who are originally from the North and West of Katanga, while only 20% of CEM congregations are scattered among other ethnic groups from within Katanga (Kipimo, 2014). The interview between the researcher and the five key CEM leaders on 20 April 2021 suggests that "despite the reality of multiculturalism in many African cities, Pentecostal churches in the Congo are ethnically oriented—both in membership and leadership. CEM is known to be a Baluba people's church, The Assemblies of God is associated with Bangala people from North and Western Congo, and the CEPAC church has Swahili people from eastern Congo in majority. Congolese Pentecostalism and mission praxis were oriented in regions (South, East, North and West) as early as 1960's by the political leaders of those days and this has remained as a culture among Spiritual type of churches, at least major Pentecostal denominations in the country. Writing on ethnicity in the African churches, Zambia to be specific, some scholars observe that the missionary denominations in Africa were established along tribal lines (Rutoro, 2007:76; Munikwa, 2011:91).

This ethnically exclusive leadership has also contributed greatly to the schisms within Pentecostalism. Three schism in the CEM were caused by this leadership factor—the 1987, 1991 and 2001 schisms. Despite the negativity this pattern has brought to the Pentecostal movement, there is a biblical precedent for familial leadership succession in the church. For instance, the Old Testament demonstrates how God chose one person, Abraham (Genesis 12), and through him, the nation of Israel to serve him among all nations. But again, not all tribes—even in Israel—were selected by God to serve him as priest in the temple and carry the ark of the covenant, but only the tribe of Levi. This does not mean that there was segregation or tribalism, but this was divine choice that cannot be questioned. The Baluba people's leadership in the CEM should not be a concern for the church. Their long service in leadership should not become an obstacle to the growth of the church and lead to schisms. Pentecostals should accept God's choice and support those God has ordained in one particular tribe to lead a church. However, this should not be to the expense of the priesthood of all believers, which is indispensable to Pentecostal theology (Keener, 2000:712; Hale, 2000:623; Adeyemo, 2006:1520).

4.4 Inadequate leadership training

The lack of training among Pentecostals in general, and Congolese Pentecostals in particular, has been a setback to the growth of the church and has resulted in various schisms within the church. Kipimo (2014:80) reports that Ephraim Kayumba broke away from CEM and started his own church denomination in 1959 because he did not want to be led by a spiritual leader who was not trained theologically. The interview between the researcher and the five key CEM leaders on 20 April 2021 suggests that 30-40% of pastors, especially younger ones, have at least some basic bible school training. However, the gap is still huge as the majority are not yet theologically trained. Anderson (2004:240) citing McClung (1986:76) submits that "Until recently, Pentecostals have not had a tradition of formal training for their ministers. Leaders tend to come from the lower strata of society where their charismatic abilities were encouraged." The researcher has argued elsewhere that this feature among Congolese Pentecostals manifests itself in various ways. Among these are poor hermeneutics characterised by misinterpretation of Scripture, an overemphasis on the anointing of the Spirit as a replacement for Theological training based on an erroneous reading of 1 John 2:27, and weak apologetics in the face of doctrinal error. Such issues lead to the loss of church members to non-Christian religious groups (Kipimo, 2014).

Investigations around this topic in Pentecostal scholarship suggest that Western missionaries often advance the lack of trained leadership in the African church—especially the Pentecostal or Spirit-type churches as the reason for their continuous

influence on the church in Africa. For some time, Pentecostals have been known as a people who are suspicious of theological education, in the name of "the anointing" (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2017:4-12). Writing on Pentecostals' negative attitude toward theological education, Hollenweger (1997:194) observed that "there was a time when Pentecostals called academic theology a tragedy, whose fruit is empty churches. The decline in the churches is the result of our 'theologising to death'." The researcher contends that the future of Pentecostal churches in the Congo rests on the quality of leadership that the church will be able to produce. Theological training is, therefore, no longer an option to the future of the Pentecostal mission in Congo, but an obligation. Hollenweger (1997:197) identified this needed change in perspective:

> [T]he climate among Pentecostal intellectuals toward theological training is changing. Rather than being objects of research for other scholars, Pentecostals are awakening in the area of theological, missiological and other studies. Pentecostals are rising up to the question of race; discovering the enormous political and social potential of their own past; and beginning to enter the scholarly dialogue and the political debate on many issues.

4.5 Failure to follow administrative rules in the church

The failure of Pentecostals to apply their constitutions or by-laws consistently has been another leading factor contributing to schisms among Pentecostals in Congo. Writing on Pentecostalism and schism in Zambia, Soko (2010:105-120) points out that "failure to follow the constitution of the Reformed Church in Zambia led to splits that brought about new charismatic churches in Mutendere, Lusaka". This factor was one of the causes for CEM's first breakaway in 1959 and the second split in 1986. The researcher has identified three reasons behind this administrative failure elsewhere (Kipimo, 2014).

First, Pentecostals by their nature value oral tradition more than literacy culture. For most of them, drawing up church constitutions is considered simply a legal exercise leading to church registration or recognition by the government. The perception is that these documents do not carry any form of authority when it comes to addressing administrative issues or the running of the church. In other words, constitutions for Pentecostals in Congo are simply papers prepared by the church in compliance with the government conditions.

Second, Pentecostals in Katanga are inclined toward spirituality. They strongly believe in the "leading" of the Holy Spirit, even when it has to do with issues of administration. Whenever faced with a new administrative challenge, CEM members would seek the "mind" of God through fasting and prayer, rather than consult what

the church's constitution says. However, this trend of overlooking church administrative documents in the name of the "leading" of the Spirit does not spare the church from trouble and misunderstanding, because more than one leader often claims to have "a word from the Lord" about the situation.

The last reason for administrative failure is the authority invested in the "church founder," "leading apostle" or "presiding bishop." Their authority in the administration of the church surpasses that of the written church constitution. Since their church members hold them in high esteem and consider them as custodians of divine authority, they are often considered as the incarnation of God's power. Their decision is final and unquestionable, even if it is contrary to the written church constitution.

5. Schisms or splits in biblical perspectives — a look at 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 and 3:1-4

In the previous section, the researcher focused on answering the question: "why are the Pentecostal churches in the Congo experiencing schisms?" Several reasons were presented. The next section analyses schisms from a biblical perspective, this section responds to Osmer's (2008) third question: "What *ought to be going on? What could be the ideal in dealing with schisms in the church?* There are some cases of splits in the early church that affected the mission of the church, such as Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36-40), Euodia and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2-3), and many others. However, Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 and 3:1-4 develops some responses to this challenge that the researcher found relevant and applicable to the church today. The choice of 1 Corinthians in this section does not necessarily mean that there are many parallels between the CEM and the division among the Corinthians, but it illustrates how the early Christians addressed schism in the church that arose around leadership; this serves as a model for Pentecostals in Congo and beyond. This is important missiologically because the church's witness and the mission of the apostles were being affected by splits in the church. In addition, one cannot talk about the church's witness in scriptures outside the framework of mission. Apostles and early church Christians were mission minded, and what happened in the church also affected their missionary work. Before analysing the pericopes, the broader context of 1 Corinthians 1:10-4:21 will be presented.

5.1 The context

After the epistolary introduction (1 Cor 1:1-9), Paul launches into the following appeal: "I appeal to you, brothers, and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another, so that there may be no division among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thoughts (NIV)." This appeal

summarises Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 1:11–4:21 (Davis, 2012:26; Hays, 2011:54). The Corinthian church was a community divided and much of the letter is a call for unity. Hays (2011:54) posits "The word in 1:10 translated as 'united' may carry the connotation of restoration to a prior condition, putting in order of something that has fallen into disarray." The reading of 1:10-17 suggests that the apostle Paul left the Corinthian church in unity and harmony. However, the news received from Chloe's house (v. 11), necessitated this letter as response. Since the letter deals with several problems that Christians at Corinth were facing, this section of the paper will only focus on the first problem—divisions in the church which aligns with the topic under investigation.

5.2 1 Corinthians 1:10–17

"What I mean is this, one of you says, 'I follow Paul', another, 'I follow Apollos', another 'I follow Cephas'; still another 'I follow Christ'" (1:12; see 3:4, NIV).

The faction groups in the church around various leaders were a key factor to the schism in the church in Corinth. Adeyemo (2006:1379) observes that "Paul identified four parties in this church, each aligned with a different person, although there is no evidence that the leaders supported the parties that claimed their names. He argues that the failure by the Corinthians believers to present a unified front was unhealthy and unnatural." People clung to the man who had evangelised and taught them, then pitted their group against the groups loyal to the other leaders. For many of these factions, wisdom was the criteria of identification (Davis, 2012:26). The inevitable result of such party spirit is contention, quarrels, wrangling, and disputes—a divided church. Schreiter (2018:120) also argues that "faction groups developed around Paul and Apollos. By aligning with church leaders, Christians in Corinth were thinking and behaving in a fleshly way, raising serious questions regarding their spiritual character. If their thinking were mature, they would have recognised the difference between God's wisdom and that of the world. Moreover, the leaders they aligned themselves with served different roles and functions, for which God ought to receive the credit (3:5-9). Alluding to the same issue of alignment with leadership, Hays (2011:56) points out that Paul disapproves of the idea and shows that these slogans arose within the church without any direct encouragement from the leaders. Paul's remarks suggest that the emergent factions might have been created more by personal allegiance to particular leaders than by clearly defined theological differences.[2]

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2 Additionally, the slogan "I follow Christ" is equally as divisive. Whether it was used by a fourth group or whether it functioned as slogan for the other three groups (Cf. Davis 2012:26), the emphasised, singular pronoun, "I" (ἐγώ) serves to create an exclusive category.

Instead of focusing on church leaders, the Corinthians were encouraged to look to God to whom all belongs (3:9). The field and the building belong to God and all others are just workers. In 1:5-9, Paul points out that all those who serve God through his church are but servants. Schreiter (2018:73) is right to say that strife and quarrelling over ministers in the Corinthian church calls into question the spiritual nature of Corinthians (3:1-3). "If their thinking was mature, they would recognize the different roles and functions of Paul and Apollos, and give all credit to God in the ministries of Paul and Apollos (3:5–9)." Craig (2005:42) argues that "the focus must not be on individual ministers but God who gives growth to the church." Paul calls church leaders God's servants who all have equal and insignificant roles to play compared with the role God plays in causing the church to grow. Since there is none of these leaders who died for the church and all are recipients of divine grace, they are not worth believers' loyalties in the same way as the Lord Jesus Christ, who gives the various charismata and died for sin of the world. To make these Christians realise the problem they were in, Paul poses them a series of rhetorical questions: "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul (1:13, NIV)?"[3]

The Corinthians' Christians dissension created an absurd situation. Hays (2011:56) notes that this situation led people to treat Christ as commodity or possession to be haggled over. Thus, the one body of Christ became fragmented. From Paul's admonition, these Christians' lives before God depended on Jesus's death on a cross (11:26, 15:1-3) and the Lord into whose dominion they have been transferred by baptism in Jesus alone. The church is saved and sustained only in the name of Jesus. The Lordship of Christ should lead all his followers to live in harmony and unity. Craig (2005:24) points out that Paul's appeal for unity in 1:10 reflects a conventional topic of exhortation in antiquity. Urging one by a deity, here by Christ, was one familiar idiom. Paul encourages the Corinthians by the name of the Lord to agree, to eliminate division, and to be made complete in the same mind, and same judgement was motivated by their fellowship with the Lord. Since they were one in fellowship with their Lord, they should also be one in fellowship with each other.

After explaining how he did not baptize many people except a few in 1:14-16, Paul moves to the last verse of the section where he emphasises his calling in 1:17: "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to proclaim the gospel, not with clever speech, lest the cross of Christ be emptied." Paul's fundamental mission was to preach the gospel, not to baptize. Hays (2011:56) argues that in Paul's apostolic work the ministry of the word was all-important; whereas, the ministry of "sacrament" has only

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[3]   The particle μή illustrates that Paul is expecting a negative answer.

a secondary significance. Christians should not be divided by different sacramental practices because their fundamental grounds of unity lie in the proclamation of the gospel. Jesus is the solid ground for lasting Christian unity. This point is well elaborated in the letter to the Ephesians (4:3-5) where Christians are encouraged to maintain the unity of the Spirit because their identity is defined by "one Lord, one faith, and one baptism." Hays (2011:60) makes a compelling point by arguing that "any attempt by the church to define itself in other terms whether in the name of the leaders, or doctrines or good causes—will promote schism in the church."

Paul's statement in verse 17 also sets the tone for the following discussion on God's wisdom being alternative to that of the world (1:18-3:20; Davis, 2012:26). This serves as a powerful warning to the Corinthian church not to allow themselves to be divided on the grounds of their perceived wisdom, wise leaders, and philosophies.

5.3 1 Corinthians 3:1-4

Hays (2011:104) summarises Paul's argument in this section as follows:

> The real measure of spiritual maturity is unity and peace in the community. Elitism can take many different forms. Some will boast in Spiritual gifts, some in scholarly knowledge, some in doctrinal correctness or moral uprightness or proper political concerns.

Hays adds that Paul illustrates the necessity of the truth-revealing Spirit of God and the story of the cross in enabling believers to seek unity in their faith communities. Paul refers to these believers as fleshly and infants in Christ (3:1). Alluding to the spiritual status of believers in Corinth, Craig (1994:112) observes that the adjective σαρκίνοις, used here (see also 3:3) can effectively be translated as "carnal" or "fleshly"—dominated by one's sinful nature. This implies that the behaviour of the Corinthians was not determined by the Spirit. Craig (1994:107) affirms this by defining being spiritual not merely as having the Spirit but having the Spirit in charge. When those who are supposed to be led by the Spirit allow the flesh to lead them, the church cannot be united. There is a permanent conflict between the old and new natures in the believer's life (Romans 7:13-25). That is why we yearn for the redemption of the body (Romans 8:23).

Paul continues in verse 2: "I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, for you were not yet able to eat it. But now you are still not able." This lack of spiritual growth by the Corinthians was not due to the lack of proper spiritual nourishment. This community was exposed to highly gifted leaders like Apollos, Paul, and Peter (Cephas), implying that the fault was to be found among the Corinthians, who were stuck in a state of spiritual infancy. Paul affirms this by asking (v. 3): "For as long as there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving ac-

cording to human inclination?" The word translated as jealousy is ζῆλος, which can also refer to a religious zeal. Hays (2011:104) points out that the Corinthians were motivated by religious zeal. The different factions were zealous in their defence of their convictions on matters pertaining to idolatry, sexual norms in marriage, the manifestations of the Spirit in worship and the meaning of resurrection. Paul insists that when such matters produce quarrelling, it is a sign that the contending factions are not truly spiritual but fleshly. This does not mean lacking refined spiritual knowledge and experience, nor does it mean living in lust and sexual sin. For Paul, it means living in rivalry and disunity within the church.

It is evident from the above reflections that allegiance to particular church leaders, spiritual immaturity, jealousy, and worldliness led to schisms in the Corinthian church. Paul calls the church to unity, emphasising the truth about Christ and his atoning death, bringing all people together in one new family and body. This unity in Christ is the basis for their unity in the church and community. Spiritual gifts are there to serve and edify the body and leaders—regardless of the grace and anointing over their lives— that are but God's servants, paling in comparison to God's role of growing the church (3:5-9).

6. Towards a biblical response to schisms within Pentecostalism

In the previous sections, the researcher defined schisms, described the reality of schisms within the Congolese context, presented various reasons for the continuous occurrences of schisms among Pentecostal churches, and looked at schisms from biblical perspective through 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 and 3:1-4. This last section serves to develop a biblical response to the challenge of schisms. *How should CEM members in Congo respond to the challenge of schisms? (Osmer, 2008)*. For me, this section is entirely missiological. It reflects on the need for unity from a purely missional perspective. This response will rest on four arguments, namely (1) an argument from the nature of the Triune God; (2) an argument from the witness of the church; (3) an argument from the nature of the church; and (4) an argument from the praxis of the early Pentecostal church.

6.1 An argument from the nature of the triune God

For this argument, Jesus's prayer in John 17 is of importance. The first premise for unity among his disciples—drawn from the Lord's prayer was his oneness with the Father. In other words, the plurality of the Godhead is here taken as the basis for unity among those who follow Christ. Jesus prays (17:21) "that they may be one, just as you, Father are in me and I am in you, that they may be in us …." Here, the unity within the triune God becomes a starting point—what Köstenberger (2009:621) calls the foundation and well-spring—of the unity among followers of

Christ. This implies that the church's understanding and appreciation of the doctrine of the trinity is not marginal as it is to be reflected within the community of believers. Living in divisions is thus against the Christian teaching of God's nature. If the three persons in God live together in harmony and unity, division ought not to be the fruit of those who are indwelt by this triune God.

The unity of the Godhead has implications for the unity of the body of Christ for the purpose of mission. Throughout the gospels, the three persons of the trinity work together in accomplishing the *missio Dei* in the world (John 3:16; Mathew 3:16-17, 28:19; Acts 1:8). This should be the foundation for unity among Pentecostals in Congo who are followers of God, especially CEM members as they venture into mission.

6.2 An argument from the witness of the church

Jesus's prayer in John 17 was largely oriented towards mission. Christ wanted his followers to be united so that their witness becomes more effective. Schisms weaken the witness of the community of faith. Köstenberger (2009:621) points out that the lack of unity among believers is the major obstacle that Jesus asks his Father to remove. The result of unity would be that the world believes that Jesus was sent by the Father (vv. 21, 23). Christ prays for unity among his followers for the sake of mission. Tennent (2010:448-457) argues that the *missio Dei* can be a uniting force amid different theological aspirations and beliefs. Therefore, God's mission should become a key uniting factor, and this was the intention of the Lord's prayer. Since the church needs all the gifts, knowledge, spirituality, prayers, and experiences to effectively reach the world and make disciples of all nations, a divided church cannot be effective in its witness—even its growth will be compromised. Any local church or church denomination that understands its *raison d'etre* will strive towards building harmony and unity amongst its members so that its missionary role by presence or by action could be fulfiled accordingly.

John 17 stands out as a missional text par excellence. The Lord of the harvest prays for unity amongst his disciples and even those who will believe later so that they may become effective in carrying out the missionary mandate to the rest of the world. For Jesus unity is essential for mission, just as the Godhead demonstrated it, Christ wants to see his disciples practice it as they continue his work in the world.

6.3 An argument from the nature of the church

Schisms destroy the very nature of the church. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-24, Paul describes the church using a body metaphor. Hays (2011:386) comments that in this passage Paul considers the church not merely as a human organisation. It is the body of Christ metaphorically. It is brought into being by the activity of the Holy Spirit which binds believers into union with the crucified and risen Lord (12:13).

This transforms believers into brothers and sister, belonging to the same family of God. As in all families, misunderstandings will arise, but the new marker of identity overrides the old. These believers have come from every different ethnic and social background—Jews and Greeks, slaves and free—but they have been brought/ bound together by the Spirit into one body (Hays, 2011:386). I tend to think that this understanding of the church is lacking among many Congolese Pentecostals. This is visible in the ethical orientation of many of the congregations. When believers grasp that their familiar relationship with one another become salient, unity among different tribes, races, and classes becomes a probability. Strife and schisms are a symptom of misunderstanding regarding the nature of the church.

The mission of the church is also embedded in its very nature. As each member plays their role in unity with others, the church fulfils its mission. Mission is multidimensional and it requires diversity in the body of Christ in order for everyone to fulfil their roles. In addition, referring to the church, Jesus declares "my house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Mark 11:17; Isaiah 56:7). The "all nations" concept is missional as it includes all people for whom Christ died. As people from all ethnic groups gather together because of what Christ did on the cross, schism has no place in the ecclesia.

6.4 An argument from the praxis of the early Pentecostal church

Acts 2 is considered as the genesis of biblical Pentecostalism. The praxis of these early Pentecostals constitutes the bases for most of what takes place in Pentecostal churches today. In interpreting Acts, it is important to consider its genre. While it should be acknowledged as historical narrative (which means that the book as a whole should not blindly be regarded as normative), Acts remains a unique source regarding Pentecostal spirituality and praxis, and can be used to teach Spirit-oriented churches how to live and serve the Lord. Stokes (2013:112) states that the first disciples in the book of Acts were all with one accord in one place. There was unity of Spirit and unity of open manifestation to the world at large as these believers seemingly walked in the truths of the Lord's prayer. What is worth noting is that from the beginning to the end of chapter 2, unity occurs several times explicitly and implicitly. This ought to demand higher priority in Pentecostal scholarship. On the day of Pentecost, these disciples were together and united in spite of the absence of their Lord and master. The unity amongst Pentecostals was also evident even in the modern revival that took place in Los Angeles in 1906. Hollenweger (1985:5) points out that "in the revival in Los Angeles, white bishops and black workers, men and women, Asians and Mexicans, white professors and black laundry women were equal." This thought is also shared by Anderson (1979:122) who reports that the "early Pentecostal movement was built around unity and solidarity of all believers that transcended mundane distinctions."

Commenting on unity among Pentecostals in the book of Acts, Stokes (2013:112) observes that, after receiving the gifts of the Spirit they were not split up into dozens of different church organisations—each of them hostile to the others, and each striving to aggrandise itself at the expense of kindred brotherhoods. In other words, the coming of Spirit among them strengthened the bond of love and unity. This is an important lesson for Pentecostal churches in Congo, that often split because a gifted person leaves to start their own ministry. The early believers were united in worship, fellowship, and prayers (2:42-44), meeting each other's financial and material needs (2:45). It is worth noting that for the first Pentecostals, unity was part and parcel of life, ministry, and praxis. Schisms within Pentecostalism are thus a contradiction to Pentecostal theology and praxis. Any church that claims to be charismatic and Pentecostal should revisit its roots from the Book of Acts. By so doing, we can be assured of developing a healthier Pentecostal movement in the Congo and in southern Africa as a whole.

The unity in the early Pentecostal church was essential to the Christian mission. Acts 2 shows how the unity that was among believers enhanced their mission outreach. When apostle Peter stood to preach, the eleven were with him (Acts 2:14). Their togetherness even attracted non-Christians to the church and contributed to its growth. Based on the Book of Acts, it is not easy to separate mission from Pentecostalism or the experience of the Spirt. For Pentecostals, mission starts with the Spirit and ends with him. The growth of Pentecostalism implies implicitly the growth of the church, which is missional in essence. Mission and Pentecostalism walk together, the Spirit of Pentecost is the mission Spirit. He came to empower the church for mission, but unity was essential—both for the outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 2:1) and to the spread of the gospel (Acts 2:41).

7. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was twofold. The first aim was to explore the main causes of schisms within Pentecostalism from both the biblical and Congolese contexts— and formulating a biblical response to this challenge. Alignment with church leaders, the introduction of an African traditional and ethnically defined pattern of leadership in the church, the lack of training among those who are called to teach and interpret God's word, and failure to follow administrative rules were identified as key factors leading to schisms among Spirit-oriented churches in Congo. In addition, a reflection from 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 and 3:1-4 revealed that factions around church leaders, spiritual immaturity, worldliness, jealousy, and strife led to splits within the Early Church. These evils can be addressed when the church, especially the Pentecostal church, emphasises the centrality of Christ and his atoning work through which all nations are brought together into one new spiritual family, that is the body of Christ. Revisiting the biblical roots of Pentecostalism in Acts 2,

understanding the church as the body of Christ according to 1 Corinthians 12, and appropriating the sacerdotal prayer of our Lord Jesus recorded in John 17, this paper called for unity among Spirit-oriented churches in Congo and beyond. This is ultimately done for the sake of the glory and mission of God.

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