

Nigerian Pentecostal Listed Among World Influencers

Newsweek includes

church planter Enoch Adeboye beside presidents as one of the world's 50 most powerful people.



[] One of the 50 most powerful people in the world is a Pentecostal preacher from Nigeria whose mission is to save souls.

So says *Newsweek* magazine in its Jan. 5 cover story, which includes Enoch Adeboye, general overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), in its list of 50 world powerbrokers.

Adeboye and Pope Benedict XVI are the only Christian leaders on the list, which features both revered and reviled influencers including President-elect Barack Obama, the Clintons, Oprah Winfrey, Chinese President Hu Jintao, al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"I certainly agree with *Newsweek* on this," Pentecostal historian Vinson Synan told *Charisma*. "I have visited [Adeboye's] campground and preached in one of his large churches in Lagos. In terms of masses of followers and influence in Nigeria, as well as other nations, he is a dominating person with tremendous power."

RCCG, which Adeboye has led since 1981, has some 5 million members in 14,000 congregations in Nigeria alone and hundreds more across 110 nations. In 2006, the Lagos-based church movement built a U.S. headquarters in Texas, and has planted several hundred churches nationwide.

"In the developing world we say we want churches to be within five minutes' walk of every person," Adeboye told *Newsweek*.

"In the developed world, we say five minutes of driving."

A former math instructor at the University of Lagos, Adeboye began working at RCCG translating the pastor's sermons from Yoruba to English. He now travels the world preaching at services that can last as long as 12 hours.

Each month in Lagos, RCCG hosts an all-night prayer meeting at its Redemption Campground that draws several hundred thousand people. Every December, several million people travel from around the world to attend RCCG's annual Holy Ghost Congress. The most recent congress ended on Sunday.

"If I were to name the top 10 apostles in the whole world, Adeboye would have to be there on the top of the list," said C. Peter Wagner, president of Global Harvest Ministries and leader of the International Coalition of Apostles. He is also the editor of *Out of Africa*, which chronicles the growth of the charismatic movement in Nigeria.

"I attended his all-night prayer meeting the first Friday of the month, and the leaders apologized to me for the low attendance," Wagner said. "They had only 300,000 the whole night long. Usually they have 500,000."

Synan noted that the prosperity gospel is a central message at RCCG and within other prominent Nigerian Pentecostal ministries. "In Africa, prosperity means generally having a roof over your head and food to eat," Synan said, adding that the prosperity message is also used negatively by some to promote the idea that Christians must give financially in order to receive God's blessings.

Adeboye has avoided accusations of financial misdeeds or faking supernatural power, which have plagued many ministries in the nation. Nigerian government leaders seek his input on social issues, *Newsweek* noted, and he recently made a public-service announcement condemning discrimination against people who are HIV-positive.

Newsweek called Pentecostalism "the biggest, fastest-growing

Christian movement since the Reformation,” with some 600 adherents around the world.

In North America, the number of Pentecostals has grown from 19 million in 1970 to roughly 77 million today, *Newsweek* reported. According to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, the numbers are even higher in Asia and Latin America, where Pentecostalism claims 166 million and 151 million followers respectively.

Grant Wacker, professor of Christian history at Duke University, estimates that by 2050 most of Africa will be Christian—and the majority of those converts will be Pentecostals.

“Pentecostals have such an impact because they talk of the here and now, not just the by and by,” Adeboye told *Newsweek*. “We pray for the sick, but we pray for their prosperity, for their overcoming of evil forces and so on. While we have to worry about heaven, there are some things God could do for us in the here and now.”

Although Adeboye is not as well known in the United States as he is in Nigeria, Wagner said he represents the new center of gravity for Christianity. “One of the things that excites me is that [*Newsweek*] had the wisdom to include a leader from the Global South because that is the focal point of growth and influence of the Christian church,” said Wagner, referring to Africa, Asia and Latin America.

“It’s absolutely necessary for us who have an older church that has not been on fire like it has in the past to look to the Global South and catch some of the fire that the Lord is setting there,” he added. “It is absolutely necessary.” **-Adrienne S. Gaines**