

Nigeria's Miracle

Some of the world's largest churches are in Nigeria. Observers say God is raising up an army there to evangelize a continent.

On a Friday afternoon in December, millions of lively Africans congregated in a dusty, rust-red field 30 miles outside Lagos, Nigeria's largest city. The people had been arriving all day in endless busloads. They came carrying food, blankets, jugs and firewood. Men hauled elderly or sick relatives on makeshift stretchers. Women carried infants on their backs and balanced three days' worth of provisions on their heads.

As night fell, thousands of giant white moths swarmed around a hundred lightposts. The silent fluttering of their wings provided the only movement in the thick, humid air.

When the worship service began, people took their places on cue, standing in front of orderly rows of crude wooden benches that fanned out into the darkness. A quarter of a mile away, latecomers gathered under a huge metal pavilion to hear what they could not get close enough to see. Then the ground began to vibrate as a team of musicians, clothed in colorful African fabrics, sang a chorus and invited audience participation.

Baba baba baba baba / Ese 0 baba / Ese 0 baba / Awa dupe 0 baba.

Millions of voices sang the words in Yoruba, a Nigerian language. The simple song (which is translated, "Father, thank You, Father; we give You thanks, Father") could be heard a mile away.

On the stage, crammed with thousands of ministers and guests,

musicians beat and shook percussion instruments including gongans, omeles, agogos and talking drums. In response, a sea of dark-skinned people raised their hands, waved white handkerchiefs or broke into rhythmic praise. They came to this open-air tabernacle, as they have done every year since 1998, to worship God—and perhaps to receive a miracle.

“The wind is blowing! There is an anointing here! It is the wind of God!” a preacher announced from the podium. A deafening roar went up from the crowd. There was no wind on this sultry night, but the man’s voice was carried for more than a half-mile by way of huge 100,000-watt speakers.

People rose from their seats and shouted “Hallelujah!” or fervently spoke in tongues. Many of them watched the service on giant video screens that had been posted far into the crowd. A 40-man sound crew spent three weeks laying 1 million meters of cable and almost 3 kilometers of electrical cord so that the pilgrims on the fringes of this gathering could at least hear the music and preaching.

Welcome to Holy Ghost Congress 2001, the largest Christian gathering on earth. It is sponsored by Nigeria’s fastest-growing Pentecostal denomination, the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), a movement founded 50 years ago by an illiterate tribesman. Today the group is destined to change a nation.

Five thousand security guards were posted on the property, a 4,000-acre tract of land the church bought and renamed Redemption Camp. Ten thousand ushers used plastic garbage bags to collect offerings from 36 wooden platforms positioned in every sector of the audience. The crowd, which included people from more than two dozen African nations, exceeded 2

million—and organizers said twice that many people came during the three days.

Although many were dressed in uncomfortable dark suits and Sunday dresses and were already soaked in sweat by the first night's service, few of them would take baths during their stay here. Most people expected to sleep under benches or trees for the three-day conference. They lay their children on blankets or grass mats during services. Eight babies were born in a clinic on the property the first evening.

"In the civilized world, they would not allow a meeting like this," one of the event's organizers told Charisma.

Before an altar call was issued, a preacher from northern Nigeria roused the crowd with a passionate prayer. "O God, arise! Chain every demon that comes against Your church! Bring down every government that would oppose You! May God consume every altar that has been set up against Nigeria!"

A shout that followed shook the ground again. Then a million fists were raised into the air, and another million voices screamed the name of Jesus. The prayers continued, followed by more preaching, then more deafening music. When the next altar call was given at 3 a.m., hundreds of men, women and children walked to the stage area to seek physical healing.

Some of them left their crutches at the altar when they returned to their seats. They had found their miracle.

Waves of Revival

Crowds like this are not unusual in Nigeria. After all, the world's largest church building is located 30 miles west of Lagos, and stadium-sized sanctuaries are springing up throughout the country. When German evangelist Reinhard Bonnke visits Nigeria, he attracts as many as 1 million people to open-air venues, sometimes resulting in riots incited by Muslims who resent the growth of Christianity here.

But the astounding numbers prompt the question: Why are so many people coming to Christ so quickly in this part of West Africa?

Enoch Adeboye, general overseer of the RCCG—which is starting three churches a day in Nigeria—sees a divine strategy behind his country's Pentecostal boom. "Since one in five Africans is a Nigerian," Adeboye theorizes, "perhaps God is raising up an army to evangelize all of Africa from here."

Adeboye's role in that strategy began in 1981 when he assumed leadership of the RCCG from its founder, Josiah Olufemi Akindayomi—an uneducated preacher from the Yoruba people group in western Nigeria. When Akindayomi died in 1980, the RCCG had only a few dozen churches. Under Adeboye it has grown to 5,000 congregations and an estimated 3 million adherents in Nigeria alone.

"God has visited us in the same way He did in the book of Acts," Adeboye says.

Book of Acts-style miracles have been the norm in Nigeria since a Pentecostal outpouring began in the 1920s, brought by missionaries from Oregon. Revival was stirred in 1930 when Nigerians traveled hundreds of miles to hear the preaching of

an indigenous evangelist, Joseph Babalola, who was based in the city of Ilesha.

Reports that a dead baby had been resurrected during one of his meetings triggered widespread conversions and launched several new ministries—including that of William Kumuyi, whose Deeper Life Church was at one time the nation's largest.

Consistent waves of miracles—accompanied by false doctrines and bitter sectarian divisions—have characterized the growth of the church here. Nigeria's chronic social problems also have quenched the Spirit's work. A bloody civil war during the 1960s interrupted a period of charismatic renewal that led many Roman Catholics to embrace a born-again experience.

But the most significant trait of Nigeria's revival is that it is no longer contained in Nigeria. Some of the largest churches in the world are pastored by expatriates who left their country for Europe or other parts of Africa.

Ukraine's largest congregation, 20,000-member Word of Faith Bible Church in Kiev, was founded by Sunday Adelaja, a Nigerian who came to the ex-Soviet republic in 1986 to study communism. Matthew Ashimolowo, an ex-Muslim who spent part of his life in the Islamic stronghold of Kaduna, in northern Nigeria, now pastors the largest church in England, Kingsway International Christian Centre in east London.

Nigerians also pastor the largest churches in Kenya, Tanzania, Ghana, Zimbabwe and Jamaica. "There is a prophetic mandate on Nigerian Christians," Ashimolowo told Charisma. "God has given us a word that our ministers will go out and shake the world."

Just how fast Christianity is growing in Nigeria is in dispute because Muslims in the nation's northern region don't want to admit that Islam is losing ground. Christian missiologists say the country is 45 percent Christian; Ashimolowo believes it could be as high as 60 percent. He adds: "Whatever it is about Nigeria, it must be special because the devil fights it."

A Nation on the Brink

There is no question that the devil was working during the regime of Sani Abacha, the iron-fisted dictator who ruled Nigeria from 1993 until his sudden death in 1998. A Muslim who had aligned himself with military thugs, Islamic radicals and occult sorcerers, Abacha was steering the country toward another war. It is widely known that he asked Islamic clerics to perform occult rituals in the capital to keep him in power.

But Christians say God heard the prayers of the church and sent a miracle. It came in the form of Olusegun Obasanjo, a military leader and born-again Christian who had been jailed by Abacha for treason. Like a character from an Old Testament drama, Obasanjo was suddenly plucked from his prison cell and placed in the presidency after a free election in early 1999.

As soon as he came to power he built a Protestant chapel on the property of Aso Rock, the presidential residence in Abuja. There were three mosques on the property, but today they are shuttered. "Muslims never thought that a committed Christian would one day live in the presidential villa," Ashimolowo says.

Observers say the prayers of Christians averted a serious disaster. Joseph Thompson, a Nigerian who serves on the

pastoral staff of New Life Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado, is organizing a conference in the United States in May 2003 to expose Americans to the zeal of Nigerian leaders. Says Thompson: "When you look at other African nations where there is not a move of God, there is anarchy. It is because of the church in Nigeria that the country even exists today."

Yemi Osinbajo, 44, a former university professor and Pentecostal who is attorney general of the state of Lagos, says Obasanjo's abrupt rise to power took Christians by surprise too, even though there was a national prayer movement aimed at healing the nation.

"The church feels responsible for bringing down Abacha's regime," Osinbajo says. "The amount of prayer going up for Nigeria was unprecedented. Our prayer was that there would be political change without bloodshed."

"Abacha's regime made people pray," adds Ghandi Olaoye, 40, pastor of the largest Nigerian church in the United States, 1,000-member Jesus House in Silver Spring, Maryland. "People had to pray about whether they would have water, gas or electricity. The desperate need made a lot of people come to Christ."

An invisible spiritual battle raged during Abacha's last days. While he had asked spiritists to bury fetishes, charms and live animals on the property at Aso Rock, Christians were fasting. Meanwhile, Adeboye, the head of the RCCG, prophesied on June 6, 1998, that God was about to bring a "new dawn" to Nigeria. Abacha died of a heart attack three days later.

After Obasanjo came to power, he arrested senior military officials with ties to Abacha. Those arrests continue to this day. Death threats and assassinations also still haunt the country, and riots triggered by religious tensions are common in the north.

“Muslims are getting more aggressive now,” says Eskor Mfon, 48, pastor of City of David Church in Lagos. “They are meeting on Sundays as well as on Fridays. They know that if they don’t do something, all the young Muslims will become Christians.”

But Mfon notes that the clash between Islam and Christianity is only one of many spiritual challenges facing his country. Although he sees positive changes, he views corruption as a serious problem that could paralyze the church.

“Nigeria is a lawless place,” Mfon admits. “If there is anything that could hurt the church here, it is money issues. There is no accountability, no tax laws, there are dictatorial tendencies, and people tend to revere leaders. If you want to abuse the system, you can do it easily.”

At the root of Nigeria’s struggle with Islam, poverty and corruption is a dark legacy of idol worship. But today a growing number of Nigerian pastors are addressing that issue more boldly than in any previous generation.

Leading the charge is Anselm Madubuko, 42, pastor of 12,000-member Revival Assembly in Lagos. He says he was delivered from the influence of witch doctors and freemasonry while a college student. Today, he scolds the Nigerian church for being passive in this invisible war with territorial demons.

“There is so much struggle today because our fathers covenanted us to devils through all kinds of rituals,” Madubuko says.

Nigerians trace their lineage to various tribes, the largest ones being the Ibo, Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani. All these people groups practice various forms of shamanism associated with ancient gods of rivers, iron or thunder. And many people still worship Yemoja, a water deity portrayed as a half-man, half-fish creature.

“Some people are covenanted in the demonic realm by what their parents did,” explains Madubuko, who has trained his congregation to minister deliverance to new converts. “There are so many who are born again but are oppressed, depressed and miserable. We are stopping it in this generation. We are determined to not let it get past us.”

Ayo Oritsejafor, pastor of Word of Life Bible Church, reaches people in the eastern coastal region where the Ibo, Urhobo, Itsekeri and Ijaw tribes have worshiped idols for centuries. He has established a deliverance school to train people to overcome generational curses and other demonic influences.

“In my tribe there is hardly any person who has not had contact with water spirits,” Oritsejafor says. “If they are not delivered they will backslide, have sexual problems, struggle with barrenness or find it difficult to get married.”

He believes his region is prone to civil strife because the Ibo worshiped ancient war gods. “You must deal with the occult to have a breakthrough,” Oritsejafor says.

Today in his city of Warri, many of the 26,000 people who attend his church are descendants of families who prayed to demons. The state's governor attends the church, along with other government officials. They worship alongside several former tribal "doctors," or practitioners of magic arts, who renounced their paganism after finding Christ.

A 21st Century Reformation

Speaking for most Nigerian pastors, Oritsejafor says God opened the heavens in 1998 and gave Nigeria a reprieve when Abacha was removed from office. "The exit of Abacha had a spiritual correlation. When he was moved out, churches exploded," the pastor says.

There is no question that darkness turned to light after the dictator's dramatic ousting. But Nigeria's churches still need another miracle.

Although the growth of Nigerian Christianity is spectacular when compared to the West, a growing number of younger, innovative church leaders in the country say the revival there is fraught with problems.

They say most Pentecostal churches are mired in legalism. Many pastors, they add, have adopted an American model of celebrity Christianity—which has been eagerly embraced by a patriarchal African culture that struggles with hero worship. People follow their leaders rather than God.

It is widely known, for example, that the leader of the Deeper Life denomination, William Kumuyi—once praised by Americans as a premier example of Nigerian Pentecostalism—has isolated

himself from other churches while demanding an unhealthy level of loyalty from his followers. Other prominent leaders like Kumuyi have made themselves virtual dictators over their religious kingdoms.

All this shallowness invites heresy, spiritual abuse and a faith that is too irrelevant to address complex issues such as social justice, AIDS and hunger. And those problems must be solved soon.

“The problem here is that Pentecostal Christians simply trade their occult oracles for their pastor. This is perversion,” says Lagos pastor Tony Rapu, 44, a leading proponent of reform in the Nigerian revival movement.

Some critics including Rapu blame the American Word-Faith movement for the problem (see related article on page 42). They say a cheap version of the “prosperity gospel” message was welcomed in Nigeria and that preachers have used it to enrich themselves.

“It has become a sham,” says one Christian professional from the eastern Delta region who requested anonymity during his interview. “I know of churches where they will not pray for you at the altar unless you give money first. They teach that you must give a seed first in order to receive any kind of blessing.”

“In some cases the prosperity the preacher enjoys is not trickling down to the people,” adds Ashimolowo. “There is some teaching of prosperity in Nigeria that is without balance.”

However, Ashimolowo is not quick to point a finger at American

faith preachers. He believes that books about healing, prosperity and tithing by Oklahoma-based Bible teacher Kenneth Hagin Sr. have fueled Nigeria's revival since they began circulating there in the 1970s. This literature offered Nigerian pastors theological training when materials were scarce and seminaries weren't accessible.

Agreeing with Ashimo-lowo is prominent pastor David Oyedepo, 47, founder of Winner's Chapel near Lagos. He is proud to claim faith preachers such as Hagin, Kenneth Copeland and Fred Price as valued mentors. And he often brings American faith preachers to speak at his church's sprawling facility—which is as big as most American sports arenas.

It was during a trip Oyedepo made to Tulsa, Oklahoma, in the 1980s that he says he heard God say to him: "Make My people rich." Since that visitation he has focused his ministry on teaching Nigerians to be generous—so they can give their way out of poverty, establish businesses and become successful.

"Every time I see lack it taunts me on," Oyedepo told Charisma. Noting that poverty statistics went down when a Christian revival swept South Korea in the last century, Oyedepo says he expects "an industrial revolution" to transform Nigeria in the next decade.

"Every move of the Holy Spirit culminates in social reformation," says Oyedepo, who has sent teams to plant churches in some of Africa's poorest countries, including Madagascar, Gabon and Ethiopia. Oyedepo adds: "If revival stops with jumping and clapping and speaking in tongues, then we have wasted the grace of God. This move of God is not to redecorate the church. It is to redecorate the world."

Perhaps Oyedepo has identified the key question facing the Nigerian church today. Will it shift from jumping and clapping to genuine social transformation? Will a church that is familiar with miraculous signs and wonders—but which still struggles to model biblical integrity—be strong enough to withstand the storm of Islam from the north and the lure of American materialism from the West?

Enoch Adeboye, who has prayed with and advised President Obasanjo six times since his election, says the answer lies in whether Nigerian Christians will humble themselves. If God's people take the right posture, he believes, then God will tear down the Islamic curtain just like He dismantled the Iron Curtain in 1989. Says Adeboye: "I believe there will be a time when everyone in leadership in Nigeria is a Christian."

When that happens, you can be sure that the shouts of praise resounding from Nigeria's record-breaking Christian gatherings will be loud enough to shake a continent.

The Prosperity Controversy

While Nigeria's churches are growing, many of them are preaching an imported message that focuses on money.

Christianity is evident everywhere on the streets of Lagos, Nigeria's largest city. Messages of faith are emblazoned on store marquees and on the sides of houses, buses and cars. Almost every block of the city has at least one church, and each one announces service times in bold block letters.

On the road to Victoria Island, a downtown business district, billboards feature looming portraits of celebrity evangelists.

The signs read: "Apostle of Deliverance and Breakthrough," "Victory Holy Ghost Ministries" or "Bible Survival Strategies Conference!" On any given week, churches sponsor some kind of camp meeting, conference or special "miracle service."

Lagos actually resembles one big Pentecostal gathering. The majority of Christians here—even many Roman Catholics and Anglicans—have embraced a theology that leaves room for miracles, speaking in tongues and noisy worship. Christianity is loud and colorful here, perhaps because the demonstrative style of Pentecostalism matches the inherent aggressiveness of Nigerian culture.

But there are critics within the Nigerian church who are making a different kind of noise today. They complain that while faith may be a mile wide in their country, it is only an inch deep.

"There are a lot of big, weak churches here," says Anselm Madubuko, 42, pastor of 12,000-member Revival Assembly in Lagos. Known as a maverick, Madubuko and his wife, Constance, started their church in 1990 by teaching the importance of character and the need for deliverance from demons. This is crucial, he says, in a culture that is steeped in corruption, poverty and pagan occult practices.

Madubuko has no tolerance for what he calls a "shallow gospel" that has become popular in southern Nigeria. He partly blames Christians in the United States for exporting this prosperity message to his country.

"Fifteen years ago, church here was serious business," Madubuko says. "But there has been a lot of American

influence. We learned from the Americans that we do not have to tarry, that we don't have to fast and pray, that you don't need deliverance and that you can do things in a hurry.

"The faith movement told us that we don't have to fast," Madubuko adds. "It tells us that we can just 'speak the Word' instead of praying for three hours. So many Christians think it is easy now. And we have a church on every corner."

There is no question that Nigeria has been fertile ground for the American faith message. Kenneth Hagin Sr.'s teachings on healing and prosperity have enjoyed wide circulation in Nigeria since the 1970s, partly through the influence of Nigerian megachurch leader Benson Idahosa. Kenneth Copeland, Jerry Savelle, John Avanzini and many other preachers who specialize in the prosperity message have huge followings in the African country.

"There was a place for the faith message," says Tony Rapu, 44, pastor of a growing charismatic church in Lagos called This Present House. "But the glamour and the glitz of the American church was imported here. The gospel was commercialized. Sometimes it is really disgusting."

"Some churches take the prosperity message too far," adds Enoch Adeboye, 60, general overseer of the nation's fastest-growing denomination, the Redeemed Christian Church of God. "Some Christians think that if you are prospering financially—no matter how you are living—that it is a sign of God's favor. So wealthy people can actually buy their way into the leadership of the church."

One prominent pastor who has helped spread the American faith

message is David Oyedepo, 47, founder of the largest church in the country, Winners Chapel in Ota, 30 miles west of Lagos. An eloquent preacher who carries himself like a diplomat, he built the world's largest church building in 1999 on a 638-acre campus. The cavernous building has 50,000 seats and room for a 1,000-voice choir.

When he visited a conference in Oklahoma several years ago, Oyedepo says God gave him a mandate: "Make My people rich." Since then he has worked to raise Nigerians from poverty by teaching them to give out of their lack. Today, presidents of corporations and hospitals attend his church, along with three state governors. And his church members paid for their huge sanctuary with cash.

There is no doubt that Oyedepo is a faith preacher, but he says he does not preach a get-rich-quick gospel—and he is critical of those who think faith is just a means to personal gain.

"I tell people to quit looking for cheap money because it will cheapen your destiny," Oyedepo told Charisma. "I tell my congregation that they must learn to live for others. We have been anointed as change agents for Africa. This anointing is not given to you just so you can feed your family—it is to make you a blessing to the world."

Africa's Islamic Challenge

In northern Nigeria, where Muslims still outnumber Christians, brave believers are risking their lives to preach the gospel.

Christians are paying a high price to serve Jesus in northern

Nigeria. Just ask Emmanuel Kure about persecution, and he will show you his scars.

When Kure was enrolled at a university in the northern city of Kano in the 1980s, Muslims who had been monitoring his underground Christian activities dragged him onto a third-floor balcony and prepared to slaughter him like some kind of gruesome sacrifice to Allah.

"They put the knife to my throat, and then they said a prayer that they recite before they kill a goat," says Kure, now 39. "But I began to laugh, even though I was under a death sentence. They asked me why I was laughing, and I replied: 'You are too late. I died many years ago.'"

Enraged, one of the gang members pressed his knife into Kure's flesh. But everyone began to scramble when they heard a sudden eruption of police sirens and gunfire nearby. "They thought the military had been called, so they ran away. But when it was all over, there were no police anywhere. I believe the Spirit of God caused that noise in order to save my life," Kure told Charisma.

Kure's story is not unusual in this region, where Islamic radicals have burned hundreds of churches in recent years. Currently, Muslim politicians and warlords have enacted strict Islamic law in six states in northern Nigeria—forbidding women to drive and requiring harsh punishments for minor crimes. Converting someone from Islam to Christianity is considered a serious offense in those regions.

"We are not allowed to preach openly," says Fakulade Taiwo, 38, a pastor from the city of Kaduna—the spiritual

headquarters of Islam in Nigeria. "We cannot even share our faith on the bus, but Muslims are allowed to have open-air meetings."

A pastor from Bauchi state, Richard Agori, said local mosque leaders monitor people's activities so they won't visit Christian churches. "And I know people who are afraid to come to my church because they will be persecuted by their own families," Agori says.

In Nigeria, like nowhere else on the planet, Islam and Christianity are set for a dramatic showdown. At one time the Muslim dominated government claimed control of the nation, but the tables were turned in 1998 when Muslim dictator Sani Abacha died of a heart attack and Nigerians elected Olusegun Obasanjo, a born-again Christian, to replace him. Today, the spread of Islam is quietly financed by organizations based in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

"The kingmakers in the north want to maintain the impression that the whole of the north is Muslim when it is not," Kure says. Recent statistics suggest that the country is 45 percent Christian and 44 percent Muslim—with a growing Christian revival spreading even in the most resistant Islamic strongholds.

Kure, an aggressive church-planter who establishes "prayer towers" throughout the north as well as in Europe and other parts of Africa, is serious about arresting the spiritual powers behind Islam. In 1999, the day before Obasanjo's inauguration, Kure laid hands on the president, prayed for him and charged him to make a fresh covenant with God.

Kure maintains that the Muslim insurgence in the north is rooted in the occult. He saw this firsthand when he watched Muslim clerics walking in the streets of Kaduna, pouring libations on the ground and claiming the nation for Islam prior to an election.

“Muslim clerics in Nigeria have not accepted our president, and they chant against him,” he says. “Muslims carry out incantations and enchantments by reciting verses from the Quran. They even call upon demonic spirits to remove ‘infidels’ who oppose Allah.”

The clash between the two religions could lead to further bloodshed. Riots incited by Islamic radicals came like waves in 1987 and 1996, and many pastors have been murdered. One report released last year by Compass Direct estimated that 294 churches in Kaduna state alone had been burned since 2000, and many Christian children have been orphaned by the violence.

But Kure, who was almost sacrificed on a Muslim altar, believes Christians in the north are prepared to die for their faith. “We have experienced many baptisms of fire,” he says. “This has made us stronger.”

Marching to a Different Drum

Nigerian church-planter Tony Rapu has broken ranks with status quo Christianity and is calling Nigerian believers to transform society.

When you ask a typical Nigerian pastor about the state of the church in that country, most will eagerly describe the staggering membership numbers, the surprising church-growth

rates, and the impressive crowds at outdoor Christian festivals and healing crusades.

But if you ask Tony Rapu, he is more likely to rip his clothes and throw some dust on his head.

That's because Rapu is playing the role of the unpopular prophet. The 44-year-old pastor and church-planter may look like a hip Nigerian professional (he is in fact a doctor as well as a minister), but his primary profession is that of reformer. He refuses to color inside the lines or stay inside the box, and he is training a younger audience of Nigerian believers to think just like him.

In spite of his dignified British accent, Rapu has been successful in upsetting Nigeria's Pentecostal establishment—mostly because he is pointing his finger at religious traditions that people have been afraid to criticize.

"I am saying that the emperor has no clothes," Rapu says of his message. "The church in Nigeria is in a mess. The structure must change."

Rapu could have stayed in the structure and kept his popularity. Just 10 years ago he pastored one of the largest churches in the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Nigeria's fastest-growing denomination. He was viewed as the favored son of the general overseer, Enoch Adeboye, and many assumed that Rapu might one day assume leadership of the group. During his time in the RCCG, he helped steer many of the group's churches to adopt more progressive music and ministry styles.

But in 1997 Rapu decided that he could not work within the system. When he pulled out, many of his colleagues in the RCCG blacklisted him as a rebel. He went to England for two years, then returned and pioneered a new church in Lagos near Nigeria's most prominent law school. The congregation, known as This Present House, attracts students and young professionals who feel out of place in the traditional confines of African Pentecostalism.

"I've always felt that the church shouldn't be just about getting together on Sunday morning," Rapu told Charisma. "We must make an impact on society. You can't just camp around Pentecost."

Among the issues Rapu addresses is the tendency of Nigerians to worship their leaders. "Pastors, ministers and leaders have become surrogate parents mediating between God and us. Most of our Christian experience then becomes nothing more than doing what the leaders tell us to do," Rapu wrote in a monthly publication he produces, *The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness*.

Rapu also has come down hard on the authoritarian leadership style that is so prevalent in the Nigerian church. And he is a vehement critic of the competitive, territorial spirit that prevents churches in his country from cooperating. "Pastors, please release the people of God. You are not the Holy Spirit. The superstar and celebrity mentality of the 'anointed' must be nailed to the cross," Rapu says.

Adeboye, who was Rapu's mentor and spiritual father for so many years, says he is still hurt over Rapu's decision to leave the RCCG. "I doubt there is any one of my spiritual children who can see farther than him," Adeboye told Charisma.

It is that spiritual farsightedness that makes Rapu one of the most innovative leaders in Africa today. If he keeps reaching the younger crowd, Nigerians may be surprised by how quickly his offbeat message is eventually embraced by the mainstream church.

J. Lee Grady traveled to Nigeria with Joseph Thompson, who is co-sponsoring a Nigerian revival conference in May 2003 in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Speakers will include Anselm Madubuko, David Oyedepo, Enoch Adeboye, Sunday Adelaja, Emmanuel Kure and Ayo Oritsejafor.