

Testimonies of Poverty and Prosperity in Tanzanian Charismatic Christianity

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RESÜMEE

Päivi Hasu: Aussagen über Armut und Wohlstand im charismatischen Christentum in Tansania¹

Der Aufsatz untersucht Zeugnisse von Frauen in der charismatischen Wiedererweckungsbewegung in Tansania und die geschlechtsspezifischen Erfahrungen von sozialem Leid, Armut und Wohlstand im Kontext des „Evangeliums des Wohlstandes“ (Faith Gospel) sowie der neoliberalen Ökonomie. Die Aussagen von Frauen in ländlichen und städtischen Gebieten Tansanias widerspiegeln wirtschaftliches und soziales Leid, aber durch Bekehrung und die Überzeugung, gerettet zu sein, erleben Einzelpersonen eine Transformation und Familien eine Umstrukturierung. Frauen, die sich der Bewegung anschließen, gewinnen anscheinend mehr als Männer, die es schwierig finden, die hohen Kosten langfristig zu tragen. Das Evangelium des Wohlstandes findet mehr Resonanz in den Städten, aber andererseits sehen sich Frauen auf dem Lande gezwungen, um Wunder zu beten.

- ¹ An earlier version of this essay was presented at the workshop “Religious Space and the Shaping of Gender Identities in Transcultural Encounters” arranged at the University of Leipzig on 5-6 January 2007. I am grateful for all the comments and suggestions that I was fortunate to receive. This is based on over 24 hours of recorded preachings and teachings as well as numerous full days of participant observation at the seminars organized by Mana ministry, led by Mr Christopher Mwakasege, in Moshi, Arusha and Dar es Salaam. I have also examined a 40-page document entitled *Mkristo na uchumi* (Christian and the Economy) on the website www.mwakasege.org. I also base this essay on about 30 testimony-type personal life history interviews in rural Kilimanjaro and in Dar es Salaam. I am grateful to my assistants Sia Mseke, Avelin Chuwa and Geoven Festo Rwiza, who have made this study possible with their devoted assistance. This research was funded by the Nordic Africa Institute and Finnish Cultural Foundation. At the last stages it also received funding from the project “Construction of African Christian Identity as a Dialogue between the Local and the Global”, directed by Dos. Dr. Mika Vähäkangas and funded by the University of Helsinki.

A global wave of Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity has been sweeping across all of Africa during the past few decades.² Consequently, this phenomenon has received a great deal of scholarly attention during the past few decades in different parts of the continent. Many of the studies have concentrated on healing and deliverance. Some have looked at the global media culture and yet others have discussed consumption of commodities in the context of born-again Christianity.³ Various studies on urban neo-Pentecostalism and charismatic Christianity have suggested that it is related to coping with pressures and demands of modernity by virtue of leaving traditional ways of life and breaking with the past.⁴ Studies in rural areas, on the other hand, have been few. A few studies have taken gender as the prime focus examining the gendered nuances of social change, neoliberal economy, and accumulation and Pentecostal-charismatic ideals of domesticity.⁵ From the colonial era the Christianisation of women has been driven by the need to train women as wives of the already converted men, as the creators of Christian homes. Also the Pentecostal-charismatic churches value women's roles in creating Christian domesticity and reproducing the born-again movement. This paper looks at testimonies of women in the charismatic revival movement in Tanzania and examines the gendered experiences of social suffering, poverty and prosperity in the context of the Faith Gospel and the neoliberal economy of the country. Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity is here interpreted in the Geertzian spirit, as a model for and model of lived reality. Religious beliefs and ideas inform the ways that economic circumstances are perceived, interpreted and acted upon in specific social and historical contexts. Furthermore, lived reality gives rise and shapes religious beliefs and ideas.⁶

The East African Revival movement that originated in Rwanda spread to north-west of Tanzania by the end of the 1930s. It caused a split but was re-integrated into the Lu-

- 2 For the purpose of this article Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity is understood broadly as the experience and working of the Holy Spirit and the practice of spiritual gifts. This definition would include also the African Initiated Churches (AIC), classical Pentecostals originating in the Western pentecostal missions and the new independent churches, fellowships and ministries on which this article concentrates. See A. Anderson, *The Newer Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches: The Shape of Future Christianity in Africa?*, in: *Pneuma* 24 (2002), no. 2, 167-184, p. 168.
- 3 R. Hackett, *Charismatic / Pentecostal Appropriation of Media technologies in Nigeria and Ghana*, in: *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28 (1998), no. 3, pp. 258-277; D. Maxwell, *Delivered from the Spirit of Poverty? Pentecostalism, Prosperity and Modernity in Zimbabwe*, in: *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28 (1998), no. 3, pp. 350-373; B. Meyer, *Commodities and the Power of Prayer: Pentecostalist Attitudes towards Consumption in Contemporary Ghana*, in: *Development and Change* 29 (1998a), pp. 751-776; A. Stambach, 2000, *Evangelism and Consumer Culture in Northern Tanzania*, in: *Anthropological Quarterly* 73 (2000), no. 4, pp.171-179.
- 4 B. Meyer, *Modernity and Enchantment: The Image of the Devil in Popular African Christianity*, in: P. van der Veer (ed.), *Conversion to Modernities: The Globalisation of Christianity*, pp.199-230, London 1996; B. Meyer, *Make a Break with the Past: Memory and Post-colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostal Discourse*, *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28 (1998b), no. 1, pp. 318-349; D. Maxwell, *Delivered from the Spirit of Poverty? Pentecostalism, Prosperity and Modernity in Zimbabwe'* (footnote 2).
- 5 M. Mate, *Wombs as God's Laboratories: Pentecostal Discourses of Femininity in Zimbabwe*, *Africa* 74 (2002), no. 4, pp. 549-568. For Latin America see e.g. B. Martin, *The Pentecostal Gender Paradox: A Cautionary Tale for the Sociology of Religion*, in Richard K. Fenn (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Sociology of Religion*, Oxford 2002, pp. 52-66.
- 6 C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York 1973, p. 93.

theran church during the years after Independence.⁷ Although Pentecostalism appeared in Tanzania in the early decades of the 20th century in the form of Holiness Mission, Assemblies of God, Swedish Free Mission and ELIM Pentecostal Church, it was not until the 1970s that it started spreading more rapidly. As the consequence of the challenge presented by the Pentecostal churches, the Charismatic revival has been allowed to exist also within Protestant denominations such as the Lutheran church. A distinction is usually made between the older Pentecostal churches and the new Charismatic churches and ministries.

Charismatic movements in Africa today seem to arise and flourish as responses to real or perceived crises in the social, political, economic and religious environments of contemporary societies. They have emerged out of a drastically changed moral and spiritual order, an order that has happened to make many people uncertain, unsettled and threatened in their lives at all those levels.⁸ There have been two important trends in Tanzanian society since the mid-1980s that have contributed to the rising popularity of the charismatic revival movement and the emergence of neo-Pentecostal churches: the intensification of Muslim activities and the economic reforms in the country.⁹ Generally, Tanzania has been considered to be one of those African countries where the relationship between different religions was perceived to be harmonious. During the 1980s and 1990s this started changing to some extent.¹⁰ Tanzania is also one of the world's poorest and most highly indebted countries. Neoliberal policies of structural adjustment in the 1980s and early 1990s sought to dismantle the regulation that was seen to constrain market forces in many postcolonial African economies.¹¹ The Structural Adjustment Program and the liberalization of the economy have resulted in increased unemployment and a lowered quality and availability of social services. This has taken place in the context of marked poverty.¹² In 1999 the International Monetary Fund and World Bank announced that structural adjustment policies would be replaced by poverty reduction strategies.

7 F. Ludwig, *After Ujamaa: Is Religious Revivalism a Threat to Tanzania's Stability?*, in: D. Westerlund (ed.), *Questioning the Secular State: The Worldwide Resurgence of Religion in Politics*, 216-236, London 1996, p. 221.

8 L. Magesa, *Charismatic Movements as "Communities of Affliction"*, in M. Vähäkangas / A.A. Kyomo (eds.) *Charismatic Renewal in Africa: A Challenge for African Christianity*, 27-44, Nairobi 2003, p. 30.

9 For historical accounts of the East African Revival in Tanzania, see eg. A. Munga, *Uamsho: A Theological Study of the Proclamation of the Revival Movement within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania*, Malmö 1998, E. E. Sendoro, *Uamsho na Karama: Roho Mtakatifu Katika Makanisa ya Kihistoria Tanzania*, Moshi 2000 and E. E. Sendoro, *Väckelse och nådegåvor. Den heliga Anden i de historiska kyrkorna i Tanzania*, Religionsvetenskapliga skrifter nr. 59, Åbo 2002.

10 Ludwig, *After Ujamaa* (footnote 7), pp. 217-219, 222. In the early 1990 it was estimated that there were about 500,000 Pentecostal-charismatics in Tanzania.

11 J. Gould/J. Ojanen, *Merging in the Circle – The Politics of Tanzania's Poverty Reduction Strategy*, Institute of Development Studies, University of Helsinki Policy Papers 2/2003, Helsinki 2003, p.29.

12 A. Munga, 1998 (footnote 9), p. 37.

Prosperity Promises and Demonic Interventions

Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity is characterised by two important characteristics. First, demons, demonology and deliverance feature in an important way in its theology. Secondly, it is characterised by the prosperity gospel, also called the health and wealth gospel or Faith Gospel. This gospel is a theological motif commonly shared by many of Africa's Charismatic churches.¹³ It has it that God has met all the human needs in the suffering and death of Christ and that every Christian should share the victory of Christ over sin, sickness and poverty. A true believer has a right to the blessings of health and wealth, and these can be obtained through a positive confession of faith. Furthermore, material success is the sign of God's blessings. Several American evangelists contributed to the development of this idea. A. A. Allen taught about fundraising that God is a rich God and that those who want to share in his abundance must support God's servant. Oral Roberts added the idea of seed faith, that one prospers through planting a seed in faith and the return of that will meet all the needs.¹⁴

In African cultures, belief in spirits, witchcraft and spiritual agency is widespread. Correspondingly, a highly developed demonology has evolved in the modern charismatic Christianity.¹⁵ An important feature in the understanding of the existence of affliction in the charismatic revival is therefore the emphasis on the activity of demons. Satan is perceived as the ultimate cause behind the existence of evil. Physical calamities and sin are desired and designed by Satan, but God can also permit calamities.¹⁶ Demons are often perceived as real, concrete and harmful beings and are sometimes described in anthropomorphic terms, as evil spirits who can be sent to or cast out from a person. They have the power and capacity to control the host, although they might exist in a person without his knowledge.¹⁷

It is perhaps for this reason that the charismatic movement so effectively deals with people's concerns. It takes beliefs, perceptions and existential concerns seriously and is able to deal with them. Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity appears to be able to contain the occult much better than established mission churches. While the latter prefer not to talk about the "powers of darkness" in public, or even regard them as superstitious figments of popular imagination, Pentecostal-charismatic churches take seriously the threat of spirits and sorcery for instance. By taking such forces and powers seriously the Pentecostal and other charismatic churches have moved close to the experience of

13 For a more detailed account of the American origins and development of prosperity gospel, see S. Brouwer/P. Gifford/S. D. Rose (eds.), *Exporting the American Gospel: Global Christian Fundamentalism*, New York 1996.

14 *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27, 171; P. Gifford, Complex provenance of Some Elements of African Pentecostal Theology, in: A. Corten / R. Marshall-Fratani (eds.), *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America*, 62-79, Bloomington 2001, p. 62. Also, Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*, 1974; Gloria Copeland, *God's Will is Prosperity*, 1978; Kenneth E. Hagin *How God Taught me about Prosperity*, 1985.

15 S. Brouwer/P. Gifford / S. D. Rose (eds.), 1996 (footnote 13), p. 169.

16 A. Munga, 1998 (footnote 9), pp. 112-113.

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 115.

many Africans, closer than the white missionary churches ever could with their denial of the existence of such powers.¹⁸

Testimonies of Social Suffering and Economic Survival

Personal testimonies are narratives that tend to be stereotyped through repeated telling, conforming to the conversion cycle of sinfulness, repentance, and realization of the power of Jesus to save. The narratives not only reflect the experiences of the saved Christians but also constitute persons. Larsson has suggested that the public testimonies are important because some events in a person's life are retold and strengthen the personal identity and the awareness of the past. Testimonies also reflect the central concern of the society in which they develop. Through the list of sins they present, the norms of the communities are made explicit.¹⁹ In the Tanzanian context, they reflect issues of poverty, social suffering, and concerns over health and schooling of children. Since becoming saved is a turning point in the individual's life, the narratives are often structured as life 'before' and 'after'. In Tanzania the concept 'religion' (*dini*) characterizes the difference between the saved and the ordinary or nominal Christians. Before a person becomes saved, (s)he is an ordinary person (*mtu wa kawaida*) or a person of 'religion' (*mtu wa dini*). Larsson has distinguished different kinds of testimonies, one category being the born-again testimonies which include confession of sins committed during the pre-conversion period and a description of the experience of making the decision (*kukata shauri*).²⁰ The life-history interviews on which this paper is based are of this nature.

Three most important elements in the narratives are first, the miracles of the Holy Spirit and the works of God in providing humans with their needs of health and wealth. Second, there is the element of magical powers, the works of Satan such as witchcraft in trying to counterwork God's will as well. Third, the born-again people also draw upon rationality and science, upon sound business principles as well as modern medicine. It appears that the born-again discourse about poverty and prosperity is situated in the centre of all three areas and draws from all of them.

Rural mothers in need

This is the story of Mama Upendo, a 30-year-old mother of two and preacher in the revival movement in rural Kilimanjaro.²¹ She has been the leader of the fellowship in her parish for six years but passed it over to her husband when she bore her second child.

18 R. van Dijk, *Christian Fundamentalism in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Case of Pentecostalism*, Occasional Paper, Københavns Universitet, Centre for Afrikastudier, København 2000, p. 11.

19 B. Larsson, *Conversion to Greater Freedom? Women, Church and Social Change in North-Western Tanzania under Colonial Rule*, *Studia Historica Upsaliensia* 162, Uppsala 1991.

20 B. Larsson, 1991 (footnote 18), p. 145.

21 The interview with Mama Upendo was conducted at her home on 13 February 2003.

She is a sought-after preacher not only locally: she has also been preaching in such distant towns as Tanga and Singida. She has also been a servant at spiritual conventions in Moshi town.

Mama Upendo brought up several issues in her life-history testimony: She talked about the difficult childhood, economic misery (*mazingira magumu, hali ngumu*) at home during the late 1980s and the consequent lack of adequate education, about the use of occult forces at home, about her unexpected “short-cut”²² marriage, about her own health problems and about the eventual conversion of not only herself but also her husband. Mama Upendo describes the actual moment of making the decision (*kukata shauri*) and the anthropomorphic experience of forces of darkness (*mambo ya giza, shetani*) that she experienced. She refers to the need to make things straight (*kutengeneza mambo*) with those with whom she had unsettled arguments. She also makes it clear that although the new born-again life has brought many improvements to her family life there will still be plenty of struggling if she is to survive in such a way that is compatible with the born-again requirements.

According to Mama Upendo’s testimony, her childhood during the 1970s and 1980s was filled with uncertainty and neglect; it was characterized by continuing poverty, malnutrition, occult forces and problems in family relations. She constantly lacked clothing and other opportunities of going to school and therefore never finished Standard Seven. She was married by force at the age of 17, when she was locked in the house of a young man. The man then had forced intercourse with her, and she claims that she got pregnant on that very same day. After the child was born the relations with her husband continued deteriorating; Mama Upendo herself had poor health and they did not have enough money.

Mama Upendo explained how she eventually became pregnant a second time but again had considerable problems with her health and was hospitalized. She was bothered by occult forces (*nguvu za giza*) and had spirits (*mapepo*). Her family consulted indigenous medicine men (*waganga*), who told her to sacrifice. She lost weight until people started saying that she had AIDS (*ukimwi*). Not only was Mama Upendo in a bad condition: her husband’s wellbeing too started to deteriorate at that time:

He had a lot of thoughts and was just careless (ovyoo, ovyoo). He used to be a person who takes care of himself and baths but then he was just careless. He said that he would go and do business on the road. He did not return the first day. He did not return the second day. And he did not return the third day. His business was zero, there was nothing in the kiosk. He did not bathe and he did not change clothes for days. He was just like mad. And I suffered during the nights, there were forces of darkness (nguvu za giza). But at least I had maize and beans at home, I had harvested before giving birth. And God helped me. I did not have any help but God helped me and I regained my strength quickly. But

22 For a more detailed discussion of “short cut” marriages among the Chagga, see P. Hasu, *Desire and Death – History through Ritual Practice in Kilimanjaro*, Transactions of the Finnish Anthropological Society 42, Saarijärvi 1999.

I started seeing things inside the house and outside. And I was frightened all the time, frightened all the time. And I said: What is this? I saw a tall person at nights that wanted to catch me. It was Satan. It was really tall and I did not see the end of it. And I said, God, that is Satan! And I suffered, I lost a lot of weight. One day I was praying and I said, God, do not leave me! Then I heard a voice saying: If you do not become saved, you will perish; if you do not become saved you will perish! Then I said: God, from today on I will become saved. But I did not know what you do when you become saved. But from today on I repent. I leave everything. From now on I will not drink pombe²³ any more. I got off the bed and knelt on the floor to pray. When I finished, I put the New Testament under my pillow as if it was an amulet.

Mama Upendo became saved in 1992. Those were the times when the entire revival movement faced a lot of opposition. Also Mama Upendo had to face the anger of her father-in-law, who threatened her physically after she converted. And the difficulties with her husband continued even after she had become saved:

He sold all our things, our clothes. One day some people came to me and said that he owed them a lot of money. He was bothered by shetani. He drank that filthy pombe, that denge²⁴. He had majini (spirits) but I do not know where he got them. Then one day the local militia came to our house and said that he had debts. He had been to a lot of people to borrow money and they believed him. But they did not see the money any more. He told me that people entered his kiosk; they opened the door and took the money. But when we looked at the kiosk it was closed in the same way he had closed it. We discovered that it was majini, forces of darkness.

When I talked with Mama Upendo, she gave several testimonies of how God had been operating in her life. In 1992, when she became saved, she also had an unplanned pregnancy but lost the child. She prayed to God: “Lord Jesus, if Satan is trying to get my soul, in the name of Jesus, let it not have it!” She continued explaining to me: “After I became saved I knew that my enemy was Satan”.

Mama Upendo’s life with her husband had been so miserable that a friend of hers tried to persuade her to run away and leave him: “Let’s run away, let’s go to Mombasa and work for other people to leave this misery behind.” But Mama Upendo remembered her marriage vows “for better and for worse”. In 1994, two years after Mama Upendo herself became born-again, her husband finally wanted to follow:

At that time God had already opened the door. They (saved brethren) asked him that if God gave him clothes right then would he participate in the fellowship. He said yes. Then they prayed to God to get him some clothes. And they left. After two weeks another servant came carrying a box. I did not know him. He said that he had a baggage that was ours.

23 In the rural areas, pombe often refers to the local banana brew, but the term is also used for any alcoholic drink.

24 Denge is an alcoholic drink based on the fermenting of sugar cane juices.

We opened it and there were new trousers, new shoes, socks, jumper, shirt and money. And it was just a short time earlier that the servants had been praying! There is nobody who can tell me that God does not exist! In those circumstances it suddenly happens something like this! And they did not know me and I had not explained our misery to anybody! And the clothes fit him well. The following day he went to church and has not left the fellowship ever since. And we started praying together, we prayed at 2 o'clock in the morning. We prayed day and night. And we read the Bible. And God started helping us.

Although both Mama Upendo and her husband are now born-again, they still struggle for their daily existence:

We still struggle. What sort of way will God open for us? Our daughter is on Standard Four. We still continue having thoughts (mawazo) and consult each other (shauriana). We still struggle economically but trust in God. We have a small kiosk (duka) to get salt. But it is not enough for us to think that tomorrow we will educate our child. We still struggle. God will help us.

They needed to care for the children. Mama Upendo thought about starting tailoring again, but she had no place to stay and was not able to rent a place at the market place. She needed the licence and the money for rent. And the business season was only two months before Christmas: “We have no means. The circumstances for business are not good.” They prayed to God with her husband that God would open them a door. Fundamentally, it is a question of being saved and God’s servant at the same time; they needed to get business that was not in contradiction with God (*biashara ambayo haitatugombani-sha na Mungu*). She believed that the God that helped and healed her once at the hospital would help her in life in the future as well.

Although the economic and social realities in rural and urban areas are quite different, it is evident that in both environments there are more women than men in the revival movement and at the meetings. It is commonly believed that it is so because women “suffer more” and “have more worries and problems” and that men are “harder” or that they have business to take care of. Hard life and poverty are described as *maisha magumu, mazingira magumu, kuhangaika, shida, mateso magumu, maisha ya kuogopa, hofu, kuteseka*. A middle-aged born-again man told me that men are more charmed and tempted by the attractions of modern life but also more tied to their traditional roles, which sometimes makes participation difficult: “Men think that they get loss (*hasara*) if they attend the meetings. For them it is better to get loss than to get Christ in their life.”

In rural areas, for most people the only sources of cash are cultivation of crops for sale, petty business and the market place, brewing and selling local brew and for the very few, running a shop. Cash is needed for food, clothing, schooling and health care. Extended families also place financial pressure on young married woman about how to share the scarce resources: “Your parents-in-law need and I need – we fail to get along.” But to become saved is a moment of change, old things are left behind and this is reflected on the urban and rural ideas of making the living. It is for instance sinful to brew local beer or sell cigarettes and beer. Therefore becoming saved changes business practices and has

consequences for one's income; money acquired by such means is not blessed, as was stated by a young woman who had a shop with her husband: "We had a lot of money that was not pleasing to God." Another woman, who used to be in beer brewing, had similar insights: "If you get even a little bit but it is blessed, you get further. But if you get something that is not blessed you just live and it is all lost just like that." Even such innocent forms of petty business as vending at the market place may become undesirable for a married woman if it involves returning home. Changing to morally upright business principles does not therefore necessarily make the rural poor any better off. In the rural areas, being born again is sometimes conceptualized in terms of work. A middle-aged Lutheran family woman stated: "Born-again people just preach, they do not do real work." She took the neighbour's neglected banana and coffee cultivation as an indication of this.

A regular theme in the testimonies was lack of resources for investments even in a petty business. Other issues were bad luck and illness. Surprisingly many reported that the personal or the household economy was better before becoming saved, and there was more money then. But reference is made to money which lacked blessing. For the saved, it is important to follow business principles and practices that are acceptable to God; "it is important to look for money in a good way and to use it properly (*kutafuta hela vizuri na kuipangilia*). For the saved such practices as bribes (*hongo, rushwa*) or black market business (*magendo*) are not acceptable.

People constantly refer to the past, how life used to be. They are not explicit about the positive changes, as if nothing radical has happened in material terms. The changes and improvements in life after becoming born again do not seem to be primarily material but rather mental and emotional. In the rural areas the question is about satisfying the basic, modest needs. It is about hope of being empowered by God:

Thou God who teachest people how to make profit, teach me the way to make profit (faida) so that I can get food for my child. If I did not say that to God, I would remain the way I am, and I would not have the brains (akili) and the ideas (wazo) to go ahead.

Even the testimonies at Charismatic meetings are remarkably seldom concerned with gaining prosperity and wealth but rather with healing and deliverance.

Brothers of Prosperity

I was once attending a spiritual meeting arranged by Christopher Mwakasege, one of the most popular travelling evangelists in Tanzania, who is very much liked in the Lutheran areas of Moshi and Arusha in the North of the country.²⁵ Mama Upendo, like so many

25 For a more detailed description and discussion of the ministry and its message of prosperity, see P. Hasu, World Bank and Heavenly Bank in Poverty and Prosperity, in: Review of African Political Economy, 33 (2006), no. 110.

other women, has acted as a voluntary servant at his meetings. Mwakasege gave an illustration of his preaching activities:

One day I was preaching at one church. After I had finished we were outside greeting people. Then a widow came to me and gave me 300 Sh. She said: "My son, take this money that I have, so that it help you in God's work." If God had not delivered me, I would have returned the money. How can you take the last 300 Sh of a widow who has problems? And I have pockets full of money! But that woman gave her last money to me to help in the work of God. Had it been the time when I was struggling, I would have returned the money. But after God taught me a lesson, I knew that the possibility of a miracle for that woman was in the fact that she was giving me the money. It is difficult to explain to anybody who has problems that the miracle awaiting you lies in giving the last money to me.²⁶

This example not only illustrates the preacher's ability to use biblical allegories but it also characterizes in an important way the content of his teachings and the gender composition of his audience. Here the emphasis is on godly miracles, giving in order to receive and the gender aspect of the setting where the majority of the followers are women.

Christopher Mwakasege is the leader of a Charismatic ministry called *Mana* (Manna). He travels around the country and arranges spiritual meetings. The name of his ministry reflects the possibility of a godly miracle as well as the material needs of Tanzanians: "It is not God's will that we are poor!" He is also an economist by profession and functions as the executive director of Tanzania Social and Economic Trust, an NGO that monitors the Tanzanian poverty reduction program. In urban areas the seminars appear to gather the relatively well-to-do urban population. In the North, a large part of the audience consists of farming people, particularly women in the surrounding areas of Arusha and Moshi. Themes of the teaching are adapted according to the location, and particular themes of prosperity are selected for Dar es Salaam because it is the city of business. In the rural areas issues of healing and deliverance are more pronounced. Apart from the more biblical message he discusses among other things the changes in the Tanzanian economy, consequences of economic liberalization for the economy of private people, free health care and education, principles of successful business making, market research and discovering one's personal talent.

In his personal testimony that he sometimes tells in public Mwakasege usually describes the difficult times in the mid-1980s when he and his wife became born-again but faced serious economic difficulties. After prayers they understood that one of the reasons was that they were too tied to the "worldly economy" instead of relying on the "economy of heaven". They also realized that they were more inclined to receiving than giving, to harvesting what they had sown. In his opinion it is, however, entirely justified for born-again Christians to think that they deserve becoming healthy and wealthy in this life by virtue

of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Wealth should be there for the satisfaction of basic human needs and for spreading the Gospel:

When I became born-again I encountered other born-again people who did not pursue wealth. They thought that to be satisfied with life as it is, is a state of being holy. They thought that things of this world are of Satan. If you dressed well you could be questioned whether you have diminished in faith. It wasn't possible to be born again and wealthy at the same time. But I had already seen what kind of life I want, the kind of house I want and what kind of school I want to send my children to. I had seen the things and I want to live well in this world. Suddenly I found myself among born-again people who did not have those things and neither did I. The problem was that in the area of income I did not have the means. Those people with good houses and cars, how did they get them when I don't have the means? And because they do not tell how they became rich they are considered to be thieves. But not all the rich are thieves. – I know that God wants me to be successful in everything. And if you say that it is God's will that you have not been successful, I do not agree on that. God created man as his own image; God is not poor and therefore he did not create man as the image of the poor. Do you think God put these things, food, clothing and soap in the world for Satan and his people? Do you think that once we are in heaven we still need food, clothing and soap? God gave these things for us to use now. God is the one who gives man the power to gain wealth. God is the one who teaches man to make profit. Our God whom we worship is not a God of loss but a God of profit. Man has been created internally in such a way that he likes to be taught to make profit in what he does. If God teaches you to make profit then the way you use to make profit is a just way. The wealth that one gets from God is there to spread gospel. The ones who believe in him and follow his commands will get back hundred fold when still in this world.²⁷

Mwakasege became born again and was able to start not only his successful Mana ministry but also the NGO involved in poverty reduction, both of which he runs with the skills of a professional economist. Today, Mwakasege preaches the American-originated message of giving in order to receive. He uses the biblical narratives like that of the poor widow to illustrate the need to give and the possibility of a miracle. He had no difficulty accepting the offering of the poor widow; who is he to deny the woman her chance to get back a hundredfold what she has given to God? It is, after all, the responsibility of Christians to give to God his due share, not only to receive a hundredfold but also to spread the Gospel.

In 2005 Mwakasege devoted plenty of attention to the forthcoming economic and spiritual changes in the country.²⁸ His religious rhetoric picks up elements from the everyday realities of Tanzanians, the failings of the state in providing education and social ser-

27 C. Mwakasege, Mkristo na uchumi; accessed in October 2004 at www.mwakasege.org.

28 C. Mwakasege, Kuna mabadiliko ya kiroho nay akiuchumi yanayokuja nchini Tanzania ... Jiandael, Arusha 2005; C. Mwakasege/D. Mwakasege, Rais wa nchi ana sehemu kubwa katika uchumi wa mtu binafsi, Arusha 2005.

vices as well as from the principles of the markets and the private sector. The economic changes were described in terms of three stages in the wandering of the Israelites from slavery to the Promised Land: Egypt, Desert and Canaan. In this rhetoric Egypt refers to the era of colonial rule in Tanzania, Desert to the period of socialism under President Nyerere and Canaan to the present liberalized market economy.

There is also the aspect of empowerment in Mwakasege's message. According to him, prayer alone is not enough and practical measures are needed. He for instance recommends planning and allocation of domestic funds for different purposes such as offerings, savings, investment and everyday expenses. The success with the rest depends on what one does with the offerings to God. The return gift may come in forms other than money and be even more valuable:

God himself comes to receive the tithes, but he does not come empty-handed. He comes with bread and wine in his hands. Bread stands for God's word and wine for the Holy Spirit. And you will be given the word of revelation to move you ahead. Those who know how to pray will not pray to get money. They will pray for something better than money. The money is finished but you have the know-how. --- God says: "I have something bigger to give you, I will give the revelation, I will give you the word, and I will give you know-how." God will empower you to prosper. It is not a matter of dropping money from heaven.²⁹

What makes the rhetoric of a genuine gift so convincing is the temporality: the power whose doings cannot be questioned and whose ways are not known to human beings responds whenever it suits him.

These teachings find resonance in the traditional African religions and preoccupations about material wellbeing. The gospel of prosperity is a way of attracting new members among the poor aspiring to break out of their poverty. The majority of the followers of these types of churches and ministries tend to be women. The prosperity gospel tells people that material prosperity will come as the result of prior giving. It ignores many of the political and economic reasons for poverty in Africa, reasons such as dependent economies, fluctuating prices, corruption and destabilization. Often the equating of prosperity with godly blessings and poverty with the work of Satan makes it impossible to perceive the more human dimension of poverty; that it may have socio-political or structural origins or dimensions. This form of Protestantism is a combination of rationality and the possibility of a miracle in its notions of economic activity and means to prosperity. There is the emphasis on such things as sound business practice and a rational mode of market research in creating wealth. Yet it also concentrates on developing the charismatically expressive, irrational side of its nature and seems to be satisfying emotional needs that legitimise evolving economic structures.³⁰

The Comaroffs have found parallels between occult economies, the use of magical means

29 C. Mwakasege, *Mambo ya kufanya unapojiandaa juu ya mabadiliko ya kiroho na kiuchumi yanayokuja nchini*. Seminar in Dar es Salaam, July 2005.

30 S. Brouwer/P. Gifford / S. D. Rose (eds.), 1996 (footnote 12), pp. 234.

for material ends, and the new religious movements across the world.³¹ Both of these economies have two dimensions: a material aspect founded on the effort to produce wealth or to account for its accumulation by appeal to techniques that defy explanation in the conventional terms of practical reason, and an ethical aspect grounded in the moral discourses generated by the production of value through magical means.³² In both prosperity cults and occult economies, accumulation of wealth, prosperity and the possibility of consumption may take place by miraculous rather than rational means. For those in the margins of the global economy, the Pentecostal-charismatic ideas of economic activity reach beyond where access to rational means comes to an end.

Urban Sister in Search of Profit

Although Mwakasege himself attempts to convey the message that God's return gift comes in non-material forms such as revelation and the Word, some of the born-again Christians think literally of the hundred-fold return upon monetary savings. There are even magical and instrumental features in the treatment of tithes and other offerings in the search of even higher returns. In an urban setting the idea of tithing and giving appears to be more prominent than in the rural areas: "Many Christians cannot receive the blessings, they are bound (*wamefungwa*). But if you give tithes God will bless you." Shose was an unmarried woman of 24, an eager supporter and follower of Mwakasege. She has attended his meetings many times both in Moshi and in Dar es Salaam. She comes from a rather modest background and was not able to continue her education beyond Form 2. She became born-again as a child and is now heavily involved in the revival movement. She was deeply influenced by the prayers of deliverance during the meetings. At the same time, she was also a rational business woman and had clear views over the importance and significance of offerings to God:

I follow these matters a lot. If I give offerings I write down the date and I follow it. It depends what kind of offering I give and what I say to God. "God I give you 100 Sh, I do not ask you to give me a hundredfold." I sow the seed for the sake of my life. At other times I say: "God, I pray to you. I have placed savings with you, I ask you to give me 100 fold, return to me 100 fold." And I follow my offering. It is as if you have opened a depositor's book. And I record. I have given to God and how many times have I received? I follow until I have come to 100 fold. I sow the seed, it is my savings.³³

In her testimony Shose described how she was often ill as a child and how her family lacked resources. And when she became saved, she was bullied at home:

31 J. Comaroff/J. Comaroff, Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming, in: J. Comaroff / J. Comaroff (eds.), Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism, 1-56, London 2001, p. 23. See also S. Hunt, Magical Moments: An Intellectualist Approach to the Neo-Pentecostal Faith Ministries, in: Religion 28 (1998).

32 J. Comaroff/J. Comaroff, 2001 (footnote 25), p. 19.

33 This interview was conducted on 25 January 2004 during a week-long meeting that Mwakasege organized in Moshi town.

When I became born-again I got a lot of difficulties, I was given a hard time. People used to come home to us to perform prayers, but my family did not like that at all. My family did not like it and my siblings despised me altogether. I prayed to God, “God, give me hundred times.” Even if I asked to get 100 times it did not get to what I wanted to pray for. I prayed to God to give me roofing sheets in order to build a house. Then it happened that God gave me money and I bought 16 roofing sheets. I built a house with earth walls and two rooms, small sitting room and a bedroom.

Shose was at one time in the business of second-hand shoes; she bought cargo in Dar es Salaam and sold the shoes not only in the capital but also up-country. One day she was robbed of over 1 million shillings of business money and was about to break down on account of the loss, but recovered partly by checking her accounts with God: “I took my depositor’s book and a calculator and did some calculation. Strangely enough, I had not lost as much as I thought. It was not as much as the savings I had already placed with God.” She had not made a profit at all, but was desperate to check her accounts with God to ascertain that her loss was not more than her existing savings. Shose was also clear about the meaning of tithes and other offerings to born-again Christians:

Offerings are no joke. Offerings are a big thing for the born-again Christians and those who know God. Sometimes God gives me tenfold and sometimes he gives it all. For any born-again it is a sin like any other sin to use the tithes that belong to God. It is a big sin! The ordinary Christians – some are witches, some are adulterers, some are drunks – do not understand the meaning of offerings. But if you go to the meetings of the revival movement, if you count the offerings of the people who are born-again, it is all together different! If you go to church, there is nobody who gives 10 000 Sh in the offerings. But if you go to the revival meetings you see that one has given 20 000 Sh, another one 50 000 Sh. Why? Because they understand the meaning of the offering. The ordinary Christians just complain that the reverend just likes money. Only money, the reverend just talks about money. People like that just complain because they don’t understand the meaning of giving to God. But we who are born-again we know the profit we get from God. You cannot harvest if you have not sown. You wait patiently after you have sown. God replies when it his time to reply. You don’t know how many years. But I know that God replies. If he does not reply today, he replies tomorrow. If he does not reply tomorrow, then the day after tomorrow.

Conclusions

Testimonies of women in the charismatic revival in Tanzania are about gendered experiences of social suffering, poverty and prosperity in the context of the Faith Gospel and the neoliberal economy. Women’s life-history testimonies in rural and urban areas of Tanzania reflect economic misery and social suffering. They describe the moment of making the decision to become saved and the experiences of Satan and other forces of

darkness. Demonic interventions, godly miracles and the aspiration for better life and prosperity feature in an important way. They also suggest that although the new born-again life brings about many improvements, it is still difficult to survive in a way that is compatible with born-again requirements. There is the rural-urban divide in that the gospel of giving in order to receive is more appealing and finds more resonance in urban areas, where cash is more readily available. Rural women, on the other hand are compelled to put their faith in the hands of God through prayers for miracles.

Conversion and becoming saved transform individuals and restructure families. Women who join the movement and attend the meetings seem to be gaining more than men, who often find the cost of the benefits too high to sustain. For women, there are fewer downsides to conversion. As David Maxwell has suggested, emphasis on character, especially that of the young male, is crucial.³⁴ The gospel of fidelity, hard work, teetotalism and a peaceful temper re-socialises young men by drawing them away from the world of sin into a family-orientated life. There are also regulations imposed on women to keep them modest and chaste. But on the other hand, it is this reputation that may protect the unmarried women outside the confines of the home and to a certain extent liberates them to perform income-generating activities outside. The negation of tradition, making a complete break with the past contributes to the emergence of free subjects and facilitates accumulation by freeing the believer from the demands of the kin and the community. Often as well, the believers benefit from the material support of the fraternal networks of fellow believers. For the majority of the African poor struggling with the malcontents of the neoliberal global economy, this popular religion restores the nuclear family as a defence mechanism. The ethos stresses coping and avoidance of extreme poverty. As David Maxwell has suggested, Pentecostalism offers adherents the chance of changing their responses to the limiting conditions that its macro-structures create.³⁵ The new codes of conduct among the saved often result in an all-round betterment and better managed household economy in the form of more regular income, improved family relations, and giving up of alcohol as well as extramarital relations. And it is the women who appear to benefit the most from this. For those very few who are able to prosper and accumulate this religion offers a moral code of survival in the contemporary world.

But the gap between the male religious leaders and their followers is often very vast. It is unproblematic for the successful and educated male preacher to characterize the Tanzanian transition from socialism to a liberalized market economy as a journey from Egypt to the Promised Land of Canaan. The privileged few are able to exploit and prosper in the new structures. The divine fundraising of the churches and ministries in the name of giving in order to receive certainly produces results. The paradox of Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity lies in its empowerment of women and youth through the egalitarian-

34 D. Maxwell, *African Gifts of the Spirit: Pentecostalism and the Rise of a Zimbabwean Transnational Religious Movement*, Oxford 2006, p. 201.

35 D. Maxwell, *The Durawall of Faith: Pentecostal Spirituality in Neo-Liberal Zimbabwe*, in: *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 35 (2005), no. 1, 4-32, p. 28.

ism of the workings of the Holy Spirit. Yet it appears, to some extent, to be reproducing the gender structures at home and in the religious sphere.

Contemporary charismatic Christianity responds to a specific socioeconomic context. Charismatic Christianity has been understood here in the Geertzian sense, where religious beliefs and ideas inform the ways that economic circumstances are perceived, interpreted and acted upon in specific social and historical contexts. On the other hand, lived reality gives rise and shapes religious beliefs and ideas. Whereas earlier forms of popular Christianity helped African peasants and labour migrants come to terms with the demands of capitalist imperialism, contemporary Pentecostalism and other forms of charismatic Christianity enable African adherents to come to terms with neo-liberalism. Pentecostalism offers hope and lived solutions in the struggles against intensifying poverty, marginalization and insecurity, problems that arise out of structural conditions. But there are also areas of congruence between neo-liberalism and Pentecostalism. The neo-liberal economy requires micro-entrepreneurial initiative, a high level of self-motivation, and the flexibility with which to face insecure employment and self-employment. Like neo-liberalism, Pentecostalism also favours competence over status. The Pentecostal religious meritocracy and the egalitarianism of the workings of the Holy Spirit have an obvious attraction to women and youth in African male-gerontocratic societies.³⁶

Two parallel poverty reduction programs exist in contemporary Tanzania: the neoliberal economic reforms and poverty reduction programs established by the international monetary institutions, and the prosperity gospel of the Pentecostal-charismatic churches and ministries. Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity and its gospel of prosperity reflect the lived realities and experiences of affliction of many Tanzanians in both urban and rural areas. Neoliberal rhetoric of free markets and the policies of international monetary institutions are reflected in the religious language and practices of the male preachers. Rather than having religious doctrines bear on economic consequences, it seems that for the majority of men, women and youth it is economic anxiety to which religion provides at least a partial answer.

To many people Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity offers substantial promise and hope of a better future. The Holy Spirit not only means emotional security in times of affliction, poverty and uncertainty but also retains the possibility of miracles that might enable material survival. The economies at the margins conform to the rules of a global network of business and finance, and to the attraction of the expanded marketplace. Global capitalism fuses hope and hopelessness, possibility and impossibility in the lives of African women and youth. There is the sense and the experience of impossibility, hopelessness, even despair, that emerges from the failed promises of prosperity in the lives of those people; the view of the global economy of consumer capitalism from the misery of the margins.