

The History, Founder, Beliefs and Practices of Deeper Life Bible Church, Nigeria

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Abstract

The emergence of Deeper of Life Bible Church is purely a product of evangelistic work of William Folorunso Kumuyi; which is fully entrenched on the Kumuyi's style of teaching and preaching the gospel of Christ. The captivating Christian Life of Kumuyi had a powerful and positive influence on several converts of the 15 membership: that began his Bible Study group in the University of Lagos-where he resided as Lecturer, and that was the begin of the today mega church which has its presence in several nations of the world today. Therefore, the Scriptures in Acts 1:7 is fulfilled- "...And you will be my witness in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The ministry in 40 years of its existence has become a force to be reckoned with in many countries of the world with its life changing message. One significant peculiarity of the sporadic growth of the Church is that, it is not just about increase membership but building a population of good citizens of the nations because of the beliefs and practices of the Church which is aim towards total man. As a result, the moral standard emphasized and promoted by the Church is unblinking. The members are therefore representatives of not just the Church but the Kingdom of heaven on earth. The life styles of the members are heavily influenced by the doctrines of the Church and that of the founder, which even the non-members can easily point out pretence. It is therefore, obvious; the Deeper Life Bible Church has contributed positively to the growth and development of Christianity in Africa.

Introduction

Deeper Life Bible Church a non-denominational and an appellate of Deeper Christian Life Ministry interestingly began with a 15 membership as a Bible study group with its international headquarters in Lagos, Nigeria. Today, the ministry has its presence in almost all the continents of the world through aggressive life style evangelism. The amazing story of Deeper Life Church is strongly attached to the life and style of Kumuyi who found himself believing God despite the strong temptation of atheism in the High school where he was only not a student but also a teacher owned by a popular, educated, disciplined, selfless and down to earth atheist- Tai Solarin and his wife thanks to the Christian parental upbringing.

Deeper life Bible Church emerged from the background of dogmatic orthodoxy where believers appear to have the difficulty of practicality of the scripture in their daily life styles. A deeper Life ministry concept was therefore, a brake a way from these orthodox traditions, for a true and thorough bred Christianity of believers, thirsty and seeking the truth of the scripture. It was a revival spark for several believers suffering from spiritual lethargy, cultural and civilization mix both in structure and spirituality.

The call for Holiness through the apostolic voice of William Folorunso Kumuyi sounded from the Ivory Tower of University of Lagos Like John in the wilderness and people came to him asking what we shall do then? (Luke 3:10) woke several Nigerians in 1971 to the nearness of the second coming of Christ and the necessity of their responsible living in the world as the Church-bride awaiting Christ-the groom.

Through the Bible bashing teaching and preaching and exemplary Christian living in expectation of rapture, the ministry shows the possibility of a Bible life Christianity, which remains a contemporary challenge of several generations gone, present and yet to be. The growth of such a ministry today as one of the largest church in Nigeria, Africa and the world, a mega-church with branches in several countries of Africa, Europe, USA, Asia, Indian Ocean, to mention a few is amazing considering the height of corruption, greed, poverty, lawlessness and anarchy that entrench Nigeria, Africa and the world at large that cut across from the State to the Church. It is like the proverbial white pap from the black pot. (DLCF Online, 2011)

Deeper Life Ministries has successfully taken the gospel mission to the early missionaries' home country with many converts. The Church also can be said unblinkingly, to be one of the indigenous Churches in Africa with fastest growth, and immense contribution to the growth and development of Christianity in Africa and the world at large. (Babalola, 1988 & Adewale, 1988) This paper therefore began with a brief bibliography of William Folorunso Kumuyi, the ministry, its belief and practices and finally, conclusion.

Brief Bibliography of William Folorunso Kumuyi

Pastor William Folorunso Kumuyi was born in 1941, in Erin Ijesa formerly under Oyo State but now Osun State, Nigeria's western region into an Anglican family that accepted that, the Bible was very important as the word of God. They would rise up early in the morning to sing hymns, read the Bible, and pray. (Deeper Christian Life Ministry Online, 2011 & Baffour, 2006) His parents were regular worshippers and they impacted this into the lives of their children. However, W.F. Kumuyi never had a personal experiential knowledge of Jesus Christ, until he left home to attend an atheist led high school. His subsequent radical and spiritually deeper change was not without the influence by the books of western Christians which include Charles Spurgeon, Charles G. Finney and many others.

While teaching mathematics at his alma mater; he became born again on Sunday, April 5, 1964 in The Apostolic Faith Church, after graduation from University of Ibadan he continued teaching in the alma mater and fellowship with the Church and held fast to the Gospel and believed the word of God on righteousness, temperance, judgment to come, and salvation from sin. Later at University of Lagos where he became a Lecturer after his Postgraduate Diploma in the same University of Lagos; Pastor Kumuyi Christian life style became a phenomenon, even among the of Scripture Union (SU) where he was spiritually nourished.

Education

Formal education for Pastor William Kumuyi started in his home town; he went on to attend Mayflower School in Ikenne, near Ijebu-ode, where he graduated with a high school diploma in 1961. After teaching at his alma mater for a brief period, Pastor Kumuyi gained admission to study mathematics at Nigeria's premier University of Ibadan and obtained a first class degree in 1967. Pastor Kumuyi went back to teaching mathematics at Mayflower School, Ikenne, before going for a postgraduate course in education at the University of Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria. On the completion of his postgraduate study program, Pastor Kumuyi became a lecturer in the Department of Mathematics at the University of Lagos in 1973.

In 1973, while serving as Math Lecturer at The University of Lagos, W.F. Kumuyi started a Bible study group with 15 university students who had come to him requesting a true teaching of the Scriptures. By the early 1980, that small group had grown to several thousands, at which time Deeper Life Bible Church was formally established. (Deeper Christian Life Ministry, Italy Online, 2011).

Ministry

The Deeper Christian Life Ministry along with its church arm, the Deeper Life Bible Church, which now has over one million members in more than sixty countries around the world, started as a fifteen-member Bible Study group in Pastor William Kumuyi's official quarters (Flat 2) at the University of Lagos in August, 1973. While doing his postgraduate work at the University of Lagos, some people who knew Pastor Kumuyi as a member of the Scripture Union (SU) would approach him to ask questions about the Bible and Christian living. Some of these enquirers would come at odd hours, so the Pastor felt it was better they gather as a group to study the Bible, on Monday evenings in his apartment, instead of spending so much time teaching them as individuals. (Deeper Life Bible Church Minnesota Online, 2011)

Soon enough, the time came when Flat 2 could no longer hold the Bible Study participants, so they spilled outside and occupied the front of the building. In due course, as more people came and the Bible Study Group grew, it became necessary in 1976 to find a more commodious place outside of the university campus. Because the Group was non – denominational, people were happy to come from various churches to study with Lecturer Kumuyi as the Pastor was fondly called at that time. Soon, the Bible Study Group membership went over 1,500 and today a Church with several million membership, a mega-church with branches in several countries of Africa, Europe, USA, Asia, Indian Ocean, to mention a few. (DLCF Online, 2011)

By 1988 the congregation had grown to 50,000, and now numbers in millions making it the third largest Christian church in the world. Dr. Johan Combrinck reports that the Deeper Life Church not only has an attendance of 120,000 every Sunday, but has planted 500 churches in Lagos alone and 5,000 in the rest of Nigeria, (with an independent estimate of more than 800,000 members in Nigeria alone) and over 3,000 outside Nigeria (with missionaries to 40 countries of Africa) (Source: AFNET).

The exponential growth of the Bible Study Group, and the need to encourage believers in Jesus Christ to live the deeper Christian life enjoined by the Bible, as different from the legalism of many of the orthodox churches of that era, led to the transformation of the Bible Study Group into the Deeper Life Bible Church in 1983. Even with the formation of the Church, the leaders of the erstwhile Bible Study Group still retained the Deeper Christian Life Ministry as the larger umbrella body which allowed them to minister to others outside the Deeper Life Bible Church. (DLCF Online, 2011)

Journalist Alan Isaacson provides an insightful study of this great ministry in his book *Deeper Life*, talking with many members of the church who told him how Christ has miraculously intervened and changed their lives in response to prayer and the proclamation of the Gospel. In Pastor Kumuyi's own words: "God, in the growth of Deeper Life Bible Church, has strategically and prudently used miracles to 'make all men come to Him' (John 3:26)... (And) we take Christian living and holiness seriously." (Wikipedia.com). According to Isaacson (1990) "The history of Deeper Life is very much the personal story of W.F. Kumuyi". He is a man with, exceptional intelligence and humility, a dedicated Christian and deserves the title 'the Man of God,' which his followers fondly call him now. (Wikipedia. com)

Since Kumuyi's youthful time, he has devoted his time to reading and studying the Bible. He knows the Scriptures inside out, and has struggled to understand and apply them as he shares his struggle and love for the word of God, so people have been drawn to him for advice, or simply to listen. When he preaches, his message is clear, simple, and profound. Poor street traders, who can barely read, sit next to the university professors, all equally captivated by the way scripture becomes suddenly relevant to them.

Pastor Kumuyi's own Christian life developed because he took the Bible so seriously, and so the Deeper Christian Life Ministry has developed in the same way. In Isaacson's (1990) own words, Kumuyi "preached Deeper Life into existence" with his captivating, He further commented on the life and personality of W.F. Kumuyi saying, "I would classify him as one of the greatest living preachers, giving a straightforward Bible-based message, his sermons thorough, and always personally challenging".

He always gave a wide range of cross-references which were read in their context, supporting, clarifying and expanding his main points. He spoke clearly and authoritatively to the Nigerian situation. He dealt sensitively with African culture, but also made a firm stand in highlighting the points where local culture was incompatible with the will of God. While stressing the high moral tone which is one of the virtues of most African cultures at their best, he was at pains to specify those aspects of local culture which were unchristian and even evil. In this way he was not only concerned with some kind of personal holiness, but also genuinely seeking the wholeness and harmony of the community at large, where truth, honesty, and justice should be the predominant characteristics (DCLM,2011).

A Man with a Great Heart for God! He is not tall, and does not have a larger-than-life character. He does not dominate, nor has he accrued power to himself. He walks slowly, is relaxed, and, has a gentle sense of humour with a warm smile and a twinkle in his eyes. He dresses simply, eats simply... and... Could have assumed titles to himself as the Deeper Life Ministry developed - most people enjoy the trappings and regalia of status which followers gladly give but rather, he calls his followers brothers and sisters, and treats them as colleagues. The church has over one million members worldwide and the third fastest growing Church in the world.

The claim of the power of God in terms of miracles manifest through him and this has significantly contributed to the growth of the ministry as Gaiya, (2002) observes:

Kumuyi, like other Pentecostal leaders in Nigeria, plays the role of the traditional medicine man, whom the Yoruba call *Babalawo*. He discerns the ailment in a person even before the person tells him. Kumuyi makes such revelations in the course of his preaching, for example, he would say: "There is a man here, thirty years old, who is still wetting the bed. Raise your hand and I'll pray for you".¹ At times members who could not come to Kumuyi in person would send him their handkerchiefs to be prayed for, similar to the New Testament event in Acts 19:11, 12. Kumuyi, however, does not emphasise miracles of healing in his ministry which makes Deeper Life Bible Church less popular than the newer churches.

There have been several occurrences of miraculous healings and happenings through the ministry of Pastor Kumuyi, however, these are considered being a natural responses of God to a Bible believing and practicing believers. The miracles also can be attributed to be another reason for the growth of Deeper Life Bible Church.

Beliefs and Practices

The beliefs and practices of the Deeper Life Bible Church emerged from the teaching of the Church and it forms the cardinal background of the Church Bible Studies and disciplines. The members of the Church are to live according to the beliefs and practices of the Church as they have their hopes of the rapture and second coming of Christ as their utmost life priority. The doctrines of the church are listed below as cited in Isaacson, (1990).

1. **The Holy Bible:** That the Holy Bible, consisting of 39 books of the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament, is the inspired Word of God. They take the Bible as final authority in all matters concerning Christian conduct and work.
2. **The Godhead:** That the Godhead consists of three separate, distinct and recognizable personalities and qualities perfectly united in one. The Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are different Persons in the Godhead, not merely three names for one Person.
3. **The Virgin Birth of Jesus:** The virgin birth of Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God.
4. **The Fall of Man:** The total depravity, sinfulness and guilt of all men since the Fall, rendering them subject to God's wrath and condemnation.
5. **Repentance:** That Repentance is a complete turning away from all Sin and its deceitful pleasures
6. **Restitution:** That Restitution is making amends for wrongs done against a fellowmen, restoring stolen things to their rightful owners, paying debts, giving back where one has defrauded, making confessions to the offended and apologizing to those slandered, so as to have a conscience void of offence toward God and man.
7. **Justification:** That Justification (or Regeneration) is the act of God's grace whereby one receives forgiveness and remission of sins, and is counted righteous before God, through faith in the atoning blood of Jesus, standing before God as though he had never sinned
8. **Water Baptism:** That Water Baptism is essential to our obedience after reconciliation with God. Water Baptism is one immersion (not three), "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost", as Jesus commanded.
9. **The Lord's Supper:** That the Lord's Supper was constituted by Jesus Christ so that all believers (all members of the family of God) might partake thereof regularly to "show the Lord's death till He come."
10. **Sanctification:** That Entire Sanctification is a definite act of God's grace, subsequent to the New Birth, by which the believer's heart is purified and made holy.
11. **Holy Ghost Baptism:** That the Baptism in the Holy Ghost is the enduement with power from on High upon the sanctified believer.
12. **Redemption from Curse of the Law:** That Redemption from the curse of the law, Healing of sickness and disease as well as continued Health are provided for all people through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.
13. **Personal Evangelism:** That Personal Evangelism is a God-given and God-ordained ministry for every believer. Jesus commanded, and God requires every believer to be a compassionate and faithful soul winner, bringing others to Christ.
14. **Marriage:** That Marriage is binding for life. Monogamy is the uniform bating of the Bible. Polygamy is contrary to the New Testament dispensation.
15. **The Rapture:** That the Rapture (commonly referred to as the first phase of stage of the SECOND COMING OF CHRIST is the catching away from the earth of all living saints and all who died in the Lord.
16. **The Resurrection of the Dead:** That the Resurrection of the dead is taught in the Bible as clearly as the immortality of the Soul.
17. **The Great Tribulation:** That the Great Tribulation will occur after the rapture, and will be a time of terrible suffering on earth.
18. **The Second Coming of Christ:** That the Second Coming of Christ will just be as literal as His going away, and He is coming to execute judgment upon the ungodly.
19. **The Millennial Reign of Christ:** That Christ's Millennial Reign is the 1,000 years' literal reign of Jesus on earth, which will be ushered in by the coming of Jesus back to earth with ten thousands of His saints.
20. **The Great White Throne Judgment:** That the Great White Throne Judgment is when God finally judges all (the living and the dead, small and great) who have ever lived on the face of the earth, according to their works.

21. **The New Heaven and the New Earth:** That the New Heaven and the New Earth “wherein dwelleth [sic] righteousness” will be made by God and the redeemed shall dwell with God for ever.
22. **Hell Fire:** That Hell-fire is a place of everlasting punishment where sinners (all who do not have their names in the book of life) will suffer torments forever and ever.
23. **Miracle Revival Hour:** This is a period committed to prayers for healing and miracles. It is one of the most significant aspects of Deeper Life worship. In Gbagada in Lagos, this event is held every Thursday. In Jos it is on Fridays.
24. **Home-Caring Fellowship:** Deeper Life concern and care for the home is best shown in what they call “home-caring fellowships”. These fellowships are meant to provide companionship for members in the neighbourhood who may otherwise be lonely. This is in consonance with African communal life. Assistance is given to members in the zones who might have financial problems. Through this fellowship new members are wooed through constant visits.

The beliefs and practices of the Deeper Life Bible Church are biblical as 8 of the beliefs are literally taken from the Book of Revelation on the events of the last days as written by John the Apostle. The Church therefore, considers the gospel of salvation very critical in bringing people to the awareness of the Jesus’ second coming.

Conclusion

The history of Deeper Life Bible Church has shown vividly that the word of God handled with a godly character is very productive. The Church was established on the teaching of the word of God and through which a mighty congregation with a burning passion for the kingdom of God emerged. Kumuyi’s life is that of a servant leadership with a true heart to serve the Lord. The Church evangelistic programs have given birth to many other branches in Nigeria and beyond.

The ministry as the 3rd largest church in the world signifies the contribution of the indigenous churches in Africa to the growth and development of Christianity in the world. More so, the teachings of the Church which emphasizes holiness, honesty, self discipline, patience, persistence, and others provides the moral education for several believers who attend the church and who equally participate and contribute to the development of political, economic and military development of several nations of the world where Deeper Life members are. It is on this note that the ministry can be said to have been a blessing not only to Nigeria and Africa but the world at large.

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