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From Indigenisation to Perversion: A Socio-Ethical Discourse on Televangelism in Cameroon and Nigeria

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Abstract

Research works on televangelism in Africa essentially revolve around its indigenisation and its potential for socio-political mobilisation. Indeed, the bulk of the extant literature on the issue focuses on how African Pentecostal televangelists have adapted the American version of teleministry to make it suit African realities and how these Pentecostal preachers have remarkably revolutionised the American concept. Meanwhile, this revolution has been characterised by a number of ethically questionable issues, many of which have not really attracted the scholarly attention they deserve. In view of filling this gap, the present article deploys critical observations and insights from new research and case studies to explore ways in which televangelism has been perverted in two African countries namely Cameroon and Nigeria. The paper specifically sets to attain two main objectives: it illustrates the perversion of televangelism on the television broadcast of Cameroonian and Nigerian

Christian televisions and examines the implications of this perversion for the regulation of religious broadcasting in the two countries. The paper argues that there are at least four ways in which televangelism is perverted in Nigeria and Cameroon. These include tele-exorcism, fake miracles, dramatisation of preaching and post-truths. These unethical issues have contributed in perpetuating negative stereotypes and gloomy social representations of Pentecostalism in the two countries. The paper recommends that media regulatory organisations in both countries should constantly intervene to ensure that the essential of religious broadcasting is observed by religious televisions.

Keywords: *Televangelism, Exorcism, Post-Truth, Fake Miracles, Indigenisation, Religious Broadcasting, Social Responsibility*

Introduction

Thanks to the proliferation and deregulation of the media of mass communication, the concept of televangelism has become ubiquitous in most African countries. Defined as the use of the electronic media to evangelise, televangelism is a key feature of Pentecostalism. It has quickly become a serious social phenomenon in countries across Africa. The ubiquity of the concept is evidenced by at least two indicators: the first is the fact that, almost all imported religions – including Christianity and Islam – have, with trepidation, sought to use terrestrial, cable, satellite or digital television as well as the social media to propagate their religious doctrines and their ideals across the world. Even the smallest religious denominations now struggle to own a television channel particularly on such digital media as YouTube, Vimeo and Facebook. This urge to own religious media outfits has engendered the emergence and popularity of such channels as *Emmanuel TV*, *LoveWorld TV*, *Ark of God TV*, *Esperance TV* and *Anointing TV* among many others. The second evidence pointing to the ubiquity of televangelism is the fact that specific televangelists such as Prophet T.B. Joshua, Pastor Chris Oyakhilome and Apostle John Chi Mey among others have become the talk of the town in countries across the world, mainly thanks to their telecasts. As Campbell (2021) puts it, televangelism has contributed in making Prophet T.B. Joshua more influential than any politician in his country.

However, in spite of this topicality, televangelism in Africa is still under researched. Much of what is said about its practice in Africa revolves around three things: 1) its African coloration, 2) its role in laundering the image of specific men of God and their churches and 3) its potential for evangelisation and socio-political mobilisation in its societies of origin (Oguntade 2022, Benyah 2018, De Witte 2012, Ukah

2012, 2011). Indeed, the bulk of the extant literature on the issue of African televangelism focuses principally on how African televangelists have adapted the American version of the concept to make it suit African realities and idiosyncrasies. This extant literature also focuses principally on how African preachers have remarkably revolutionised the American concept and made it an instrument for political contestations. Thejirika (2011, 2012) for instance focused essentially on how African religious telecasts have helped church leaders spread their *autorevelezza* (the power to influence people and to be looked upon by other members of the society as people worthy of respect). Similarly, Okon (2011) limited his study to the analysis of the extent to which African televangelists use their telecasts as instruments for socio-political mobilisation. Other scholars such as Kaale and Bazira (2023) and Ukah (2020) have focused on how indigenised televangelism affects behavioural and thought patterns among African Christian audiences.

No serious attention has so far been given particularly to the ethical issues that are engendered by the indigenisation and transformation of televangelism in Africa. In other words, African innovations in the practice of televangelism have been characterised by a number of ethically questionable issues (notably perversions), many of which have not really attracted the attention of scholars, religion ideologues, politicians and commentators. Meanwhile, ethical perspectives on African televangelism may immensely help a better theorisation of the social responsibility of African televangelists as well as inform the regulation of religious broadcasting in Africa (Sanusi et al 2023, Middleton 2009). In view of filling the gap mentioned above, this article deploys critical observations and insights from recent research and case studies to explore ways in which televangelism has been perverted in Cameroon and Nigeria. The paper specifically attains two main objectives: firstly, it illustrates the perversion of televangelism in the contents of Cameroonian and Nigerian Christian television and secondly, it examines the implications of this perversion for the regulation of religious broadcasting in the two countries. In line with these objectives, the paper is divided into three main parts. The first part examines how the concept of televangelism has spectacularly been Africanised. The second part explores tele-exorcism, fake miracles, dramatisation of preaching and post-truths as ways in which televangelism is perverted; while the last part addresses the implications of the aforementioned perversions for the regulation of religious broadcasting in Cameroon and Nigeria.

From the American Concept to its African Version

Televangelism emerged in America during the 1930s to 1940s urban revivalism movement. It sprang up thanks to the efforts of Bishop Fulton Sheen – considered as the very first televangelist – and saw its golden age between 1980 to 1987 (Fore 2006). Its growth has been enabled by pioneer and iconic televangelists, some of whom include Jack Wyrzten, Oral Robert, Robert Scheller, Jimmy Swaggart, Dwight Moody and Charles Finney among others. These pioneers have, in various ways, developed teleministry through the application of various preaching styles and visions of Christianity. Charles Finney for instance revolutionised the technology (televangelism) by constantly deploying preaching styles that hinged enormously on sales strategies (Swatos Jr. 1998). Furthermore, he fondly deployed plain talk to appeal to audiences and embedded biblical literalism into the revivalists’ preaching style. Finney’s approach continues to be popular today.

Dwight Moody on his own part introduced a businesslike organisational structure into the religious realm. He also created Bible schools and institutes – notably the Moody Bible School of Chicago – which have been key tools for the training of his imitators and followers as well as strategic vehicles for fund raising. Other pioneer American televangelists deployed televangelism as an instrument for socio-political mobilisation. Jerry Falwell for instance showed political commitment through his Moral Majority Movement. Similarly, John Hagee and Pat Robertson used their ministrations as forays into the socio-political dynamics of their immediate environment (Okon 2011). In spite of this variety of preaching styles and visions, American televangelists all sought primarily to develop financial and audience support through three principal appeals to audiences: the imperatives to (1) become “born-again”, (2) reinforce Christian lifestyle, and (3) join in support of a particular evangelist’s ministry (Swatos J., 1998).

Thanks to the forces of globalisation and the proliferation of the electronic media, televangelism has exploded in the world. In tandem with this, the concept quickly spread to Africa. History has it that Bishop Benson Idahosa is the first African to have implemented the Originally American concept on African soil. Bishop Idahosa’s strides started as from 1974, through his television program called “Redemption Hour”.

From its early days in Africa till today, televangelism has in various ways been indigenised to suit the African context. According to Guerzoni (2020), indigenisation is the process by which indigenous

perspectives, content and “knowledges” are incorporated within an imported concept. In other words, it is a form of enculturation of Christianity which, in the African context, could otherwise be called Africanisation, or tropicalisation (Adamo 2004, 2021; Enegho, Akoh & Jesutenwase 2018). The indigenisation of the American concept of televangelism is evidenced by at least two indicators. First, the American conception of televangelists as independent entrepreneurial evangelists who devote the bulk of their ministries to television marketing and who get most of their disciples from media audiences has been africanised by local church leaders. In the African sense, televangelists are not independent spiritual entrepreneurs but church leaders. In addition to this, African church leaders use the electronic media in the course of their televangelism mainly to sell their personal vision of Christianity and influence the world.

Second, the fact that televangelism is dominated by neo-Pentecostals (Maxwell 2007) has implied that religious broadcasting over Christian television stations reflects Pentecostal ways of africanising Christianity. Actually, religious broadcast over channels that are owned by charismatic and revival churches have systematically been reproducing the African cultural hermeneutics, as well as many aspects of the African Traditional Religion (ATR). Some of these aspects include telecasts that revolve around the televangelists, the diffusion of the televangelists’ personality cult and the inclusion of exorcism techniques that are reminiscent of ethnic religion. It is not uncommon to come across African televangelists who, during their telecasts, propound healing approaches that are reminiscent of Traditional African Religion. Akinwumi (cited in Oguntade 2022, p.100) evokes this scenario thus: “televised miracle sessions have become more and more controversial. From pastors goading congregants to eat grass for healing to a general debasement in the presentation of the afflicted, there is often a sense of irrationality and absurdity about these practices, as well as those who partake in them”.

In view of these type of contents, Kaale and Bazira (2023, p.93) posit that televangelists in Tanzanian paradoxically promote Traditional African Religion. In the words of these two scholars, African church founders tend to use the media “extensively to persuade people to become more religious in traditional way”. The two authors add that “Televangelism’s contribution to promoting ART [African Traditional Religion] beliefs among Christians has given rise to cyber churches, which have contributed to changes in church shape, structure, textual content, and social behaviour” (Kaale & Bazira 2023, p.93)

From a Tropicalised Concept to a Perversion

In his 1860 publication titled *Lectures: On Revivals of Religion*, Charles Finney (cited in Swatos Jr., 1998) presents his views on the ethos of urban revivalism. He formulates principles which have continually guided both original and contemporary forms of televangelism. In that publication, Finney also articulates methods for winning souls for Christ. He stresses the need for revivalism to be a well planned event instead of a mystical, spirit-filled program. Additionally, Finney exhorts his peers to deploy “any means” to evangelise.

Finney’s conception of electronic media-assisted preaching as a technology that could accommodate any technique of persuasion has enabled the emergence of various postmodern currents in the televangelism industry (Longinow 2012). This pioneer’s definition of televangelism has for instance, led to the conception of all manner of religious programs and preaching styles, some of which are not only strange but questionable from the standpoint of media ethics and Christian purity. It is obviously hard, in a postmodern world, to clearly determine the genuineness of a technique of evangelism; however, there exist persuasive approaches that are inherently controversial. When used in a televangelism context, these controversial approaches are susceptible to affect the credibility of the televangelist in a negative way. In this section, attention is given to such questionable techniques of persuasion used by Cameroonian and Nigerian televangelists. The section discusses only four such techniques, but the list of these questionable techniques is far from being exhaustive.

Tele-exorcism

This refers to the use of exorcism in a context of televangelism. By definition, exorcism is a spiritual act that consists in using ceremonies and sometimes magic to cast out demons from a body, a place or an object considered to be possessed. The tradition is part of both Christianity (particularly Roman Catholicism and neo-Pentecostalism) and ethnic religions (Toner 1909). It has become not only a key feature of religious broadcast in both Nigeria and Cameroon, but also a leverage par excellence to market specific men of God (Oguntade 2022). In effect, many Cameroonian and Nigerian televangelists used tele-exorcism to assert their credentials as powerful men of God or “spiritual super-powers”. One such televangelists called Theophile Atangana was

interviewed by Tedogmo and Minsongui (2012, p.169) in the course of an ethnographic study. In the interview, Atangana confided that exorcism – which he defined as the manifestation of the power of God – is part of his sources of soft power and the unique selling point of his channel. He affirmed that: “With TV, it is easier for us [...] to show the manifestation of God’s power that we possessed. When men see the kind of miracles we perform on TV, they are motivated to come to us for the solutions to their problems. Most of the people who consulted us are moved by the miracles we performed and that they happened to have watched on TV” [Our translation]¹.

Although a serious persuasive tool, tele-exorcism is problematic on at least two grounds. First, from a media ethics or social responsibility point of view, it is too sensational. As practiced by Cameroonian and Nigerian televangelists, it involves violent and obscene acts that are susceptible to hurt the sensibility of the audiences. On *Emmanuel TV* for instance, programs such as “Prayer Time” mostly show graphic scenes of violence, poverty/social porn and obscenity shot during exorcism sessions conducted by T.B. Joshua. In these scenes, sick or possessed people are often manhandled, hypnotised and sexually objectified in the name of exorcism (Agomoh 2022a,b,c, Bisola 2017). In one such violent instances shown in BBC’s documentary entitled *Disciples: The Cult of T.B. Joshua*, a supposedly possessed Whiteman is shown seriously punched by Prophet Joshua. The blow is so serious that it sends the spiritually sick Whiteman on the floor. In the same documentary, another scene shows a heavily pregnant woman delivering her child in public, in one exorcism session that took place at the Synagogue Church of All Nations (SCOAN). The delivery happens without adequate medical assistance. Thus, tele-exorcism over *Emmanuel TV* has often been very violent experiences that can only qualify as yellow practice in broadcasting. It is partly in view of this televised violence that Campbell (2021) has, in one of his critique of televangelism in SCOAN, referred to Joshua as an exorcist who is “violent and even crude”. Similar tele-exorcism is observable in *Ark of God TV* and *Anointing TV*, two Cameroonian Christian televisions situated in the south western Cameroonian city of Buea. On these two televisions, exorcism-themed programs show men of God wrestling physically with the violent devils that presumably possess or torment

¹ Avec la télévision, c’est plus facile pour nous [...] de montrer la manifestation de la puissance de l’opération de Dieu que nous avons. Quand les gens voient ce que nous faisons à la télé, ils ont envie de venir nous rencontrer pour leurs problèmes. La plupart des gens que nous recevons nous ont vus à la télé

some of the preachers' disciples. The spectacle is in no way different from the one shown on *Emmanuel TV*. In fact, these two channels are good examples of broadcasters that scrupulously attempt to replicate *Emmanuel TV*'s style of programming (Fogue & Ndokuo 2020; Afu 2016).

Tele-exorcism is also questionable on the ground of its inherently ambiguous nature. The practice likely elicits controversy more than it sways hearts in favour of the Christian God. This partly follows from the fact that even witch-doctors and magicians can practice exorcism (Kiye 2021; Nsereko 1996). The Christian purity of tele-exorcism is generally hard to establish given that the majority – if not the entirety of – tele-exorcists tend to apply healing techniques that are paradoxically reminiscent of Traditional African Religion. These techniques include crude physical violence applied on the possessed, verbal violence and use of fetish-like artefacts among others. Thus, the tele-exorcists most often apply a *modus operandis* that clearly departs from Christ's approach to casting out demons. In effect, according to biblical scriptures, Jesus – the supreme model of the Christian – always cast out demons using his words. Nowhere in the Bible did he deploy wrestling, threats of aggression or any other form of physical violence to exorcise people. Christ's disciples in the Bible similarly forced spirits out of possessed people by using the name of Jesus Christ not violence and unusual/bizarre approaches as is the case in most instances of televised exorcism. Using this scriptural evidence as binding precedent, it is hard to clearly establish the purity of the violent and spirit-filled exorcism shown on many Christian televisions. No doubt, tele-exorcism is always subject to controversy (Mulutsi 2020, Benyah 2018).

Fake Miracles

Like exorcism, miracles are most often brandished or deployed by many Cameroonian and Nigerian televangelists as their Unique Selling Proposition. Such televangelists leverage miracle-filled telecasts as a strong persuasive approach to evangelisation. This tendency to believe so much in miracles is a characteristic of typical neo-Pentecostal and charismatic movements. Actually, the latter usually brandish miracles – in the form of healing from (incurable) sicknesses, deliverance from satanic spirits, and breakthrough – as evidence of their spiritual vitality/vibrancy and as a sign that differentiate them from “dead” mainstream Christian

movements (Ukah 2020). In other words, miracles are the unique selling point of many ambitious televangelists. Ukah (2011) contends that: [Being] in stiff competition among themselves for membership, [m]iracles [are their] unique selling proposition (USP). ... Miracles [are] ... the most important product offered religious consumers, something special and convincing to attract attention and precipitate the possible switching of allegiance from one church to another. Miracles as UPS also provide legitimation for the activities of church owner-founders, the proof of their divine call to mission. (p. 48)

The struggle to sway the hearts of incredulous masses – and in some cases, outsmart rivals – has pushed a number of Nigerian and Cameroonian televangelists to deploy unsubstantiated or fake miracles as a way of marketing themselves. One recent case in point is T.B. Joshua whose telecast for many years, represented him as a miracle maker par excellence. Most programs on his *Emmanuel TV* ultimately sought to market his ability to heal dreaded diseases such as HIV/AIDS, cancer and Ebola. Programs over the religious TV also sought to suggest Joshua's capacity to positively influence even the most desperate situations in people's lives. Joshua's miracle-filled telecasts convinced even gay identities across the world that he (T.B. Joshua) could "cure" them from homosexuality by performing "conversion therapy" otherwise called gay-cure therapies (BBC, 2024; Jane & Rotinwa, 2024). Motivated or seduced by the aforementioned telecasts, miracle-seeking masses came from all over the world to find their breakthrough at Joshua's SCOAN based in Lagos.

However, recent investigative journalism conducted by BBC and Open Democracy brought to the fore allegations of fake miracles performed by T.B. Joshua. These allegations are similarly made in the book titled "*The T.B. Joshua I know*", written by Bisola (2017), a former collaborator of T.B. Joshua who worked with SCOAN's media unit. In BBC's documentary titled *Disciples: The Cult of T.B. Joshua*, Bisola reiterates the allegation thus:

People said they were healed of HIV. They were not healed [...] Many people watch *Emmanuel TV* and think it's real. I am speaking now as someone who was an insider [...] What is happening on *Emmanuel TV* is not real. We organise it. We project what you see to you. And what we don't want you to see, we cut away. (Cited in Jane & Rotinwa 2024, p.12)

Of course, SCOAN's leadership has vehemently rejected the aforementioned claims on the grounds that they are baseless and hastily advanced (Jane & Rotinwa 2024). The church even embarked on a

controversial retaliatory hate speech campaign against Bisola and some other defective disciples. This social media-based campaign was so intensified that it caused YouTube and Facebook to severally terminate *Emmanuel TV*'s channels and official accounts on their platforms (Cullinan 2021, Jane & Wepukhulu 2024). In spite of *Emmanuel TV*'s denial of negative allegations and its hate speech campaign, the myth of fake miracles often associated with neo-Pentecostal movements like SCOAN remains hard to dissipate. The myth is hard to shatter given the recrudescence of narratives of fake miracles in the missionary activities of many neo-Pentecostal church leaders. For instance, there have been similar allegations of fake miracles associated with the founder of *LoveWorld Network*, Pastor Chris Oyakhilome (Ademiluka 2023) as well as with the founder of Grace Nation Church, pastor Chris Okafor (Oji 2024). Thus, thanks to miracle fever, the televangelism of some Pentecostal church founders has been ambivalent or subject to controversy.

Dramatisation of Preaching

From its American origins, televangelism has, in its evolution, involved innovations in terms of preaching approaches and styles. The preaching styles of Charles Finney and Dwight Moody (evoked earlier in this paper) are good evidence of such innovations. African televangelists have sought to perpetuate this religious creativity even to the point of putting the credibility of their preaching or televangelism in danger. De Witte (2018) illustrates this questionable form of innovation in preaching style through the analysis of a TV reality program called "The Pulpit" over Ghana's *TV3*, a religious broadcaster. The reality program consists of a preaching contest in which contestants aged between 14 to 16 years compete at various stages of the show for the title of best preacher. In the course of the competition, these candidates imitate and mimic the idiolect and preaching styles of renowned preachers and televangelists. The imitation is sometimes done in a grotesque manner. De Witte (2018) questions the credibility of this type of television genre, stressing that they should best be categorised as entertainment and not serious preaching.

Similarly postmodern preaching styles are observable among some Cameroonian Christian broadcasters. In the Buea based *Anointing TV* and *Ark of God TV* for instance, preaching is often dramatised in a way as to suggest the direct participation of God in the evangelical programs

of the channels. In many instances, the preachers on these channels behave as though they are tapping directly and instantaneously from God before delivering their messages on air. This impression often implies that the preachers exhibit facial and body expressions that give the impression they are both in trance and in a performance. In view of this pattern of preaching, Fogue and Ndokuo (2020) used the term “theatricalisation” in reference to programming on the two channels. The two scholars add that preaching and prophecy programs aired over the two Cameroonian television channels generally involve a lot of theatrics.

Post-Truths and Speculations

In a bid to be abreast of the popular socio-political discourse *du jour*, some Cameroonian and Nigerian televangelists have tended to turn their telecasts into purveyors of post-truths and speculations. This risky behaviour has in many circumstances logically affected the credibility of both televangelists and Christian broadcasters. A case in point is Pastor Chris Oyakhilome who used various programs of Christ Embassy’s *LoveWorld Network* during the COVID pandemic, to propagate all manner of right-wing conspiracy theories around the COVID vaccine and the 5G technology. In these telecasts, the man of God claimed that the 5G technology rather than the Coronavirus, was responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic. He campaigned against the wearing of nose masks and the implementation of the social distancing and lockdowns policies. In such telecast as “The Love World Special with Pastor Chris”, Pastor Chris propounded easily disprovable conspiracies around world events. This affected both his image and that of his medium *LoveWorld Network*. For instance, Pastor Chris’ television was sanctioned in the UK for airing the dangerous conspiracies mentioned above (Ogunro 2023).

Similarly, T.B. Joshua has on countless occasions used his telecasts to make predictions on political events happening in the world. Some of his predictions have turned out to be false, opaque or misleading, thereby eliciting doubts about the purity and genuineness of his source(s) of inspiration. During the 2016 US presidential elections for instance, he wrongly predicted the victory of Democrat candidate Hilary Clinton (Campbell 2021). It goes without saying that predictions like the one mentioned above, suggest that some of the “prophecies” used to sell televangelists are fake. They are the mere products of some

televangelists' imaginations. Such predictions also reflect churchmen's struggle to be popular at all cost.

It goes without saying that the perversions mentioned above are susceptible to amplify the negative stereotypes about neo-Pentecostal movements in Nigeria and Cameroon. These perversions come to give credence to various negative myths, some of which include junk Christianity, personality cult and stories of brainwashed disciples. These myth are often associated with Pentecostalism in the two countries. The myths are very popular particularly among members of the mainstream churches and critical scholars (Fallut 2012, Tedogmo & Minsongui 2012). In effect, in the popular Cameroonian and Nigerian imaginaries, neo-Pentecostal movements are characterised by so many contradictions, some of which include the perversions mentioned above. It is popularly believed that these movements appropriate various traditions that are reminiscent of African Traditional Religion (Kaale & Bazira 2023; Kalu 2008). They are majorly led by founders who hardly undergo training in theology schools and who are eager to use various forms of authoritarianism to consolidate their supremacy in the movements (Mulutsi 2020). These founders' unorthodox ascension to leadership and non-conformist/postmodern visions of Christianity are reflected in their strange – nay questionable – styles of televangelism.

Implications for the Regulation of Religious Broadcasting

The perversions mentioned above call for a thither control of religious broadcasting in Cameroon and Nigeria. Critics have often viewed the ban on church-owned audiovisual media in Nigeria as authoritarianism (Ukah 2011; Okon 2011). This reading is not totally unfounded, given that the ban somewhat enables the muzzling of potential anti-government critics. However, the recrudescence of the perversions mentioned above suggests that the unethical televangelism over Nigerian airwaves could be worse if the ban was lifted or inexistent. The intension of this author is far from lauding the ban. This author rather aims to underline a paradox. He contends that although questionable, the ban on church-owned televisions accidentally limits unethical televangelism over Nigerian airwaves. The perversions explored above also give credence to Nigerian government's banning of unsubstantiated miracles over Nigerian airwaves since 2004.

A similar reading could be made about social media's repeated closures of the online channels of some deviant religious broadcasters.

As earlier mentioned, social media such as YouTube and Facebook have not hesitated to terminate the channels of television such as *Emmanuel TV* on the ground of unethical broadcast, notably tele-exorcism that purveys hate speech against protected identities such as gays (Jane & Rotinwa 2024, Cullinan 2021). This muscular move by the social media platforms has always elicited mixed reactions from observers. Members of affected neo-Pentecostal movements have usually interpreted this censorship along theories that range from post-colonialism and cultural imperialism to cultural relativism. This notwithstanding, the social media's muscular actions against deviant televangelism are laudable if we read them along the theory of social responsibility of the media.

While church-owned media are prohibited in Nigeria, the situation is slightly different in Cameroon. The Cameroonian government allows Christian broadcasters to operate in the country, but in a situation of legal and financial precariousness that exposes these religious broadcasters to arbitrary closure or intimidation from the people in power. These broadcasters are technically illegal given that none, except Catholic Church-owned *Radio Veritas*, is licensed. The church-owned broadcasters operate under a dispensation of tolerance. This kind of media system is mainly interpreted as a sign of government's authoritarianism. However, the yellow practices – and perversions of televangelism – regularly observed on many of the country's Christian televisions plead in favour of sanctions, instead of licensing of these Christian audiovisual media. Again, the idea here is not to legitimate covert authoritarianism, but to show the paradox of this authoritarianism.

The aforementioned perversions also imply that a number formal and informal mechanisms should be mounted to train televangelists and aspiring televangelists in the fields of broadcasting and preaching. Such mechanisms should place emphasis on media ethics. Ethnographic studies conducted in Cameroon suggest that many of the church leaders/founders who go on air, are mostly driven by simple “divine inspiration”. They mostly have little or no training in mass communication or media ethics and are thus guided by trial-and-error theories (Balla 2020, Tedogmo & Minsongui 2012, Fallut 2012, Afu, 2016). Informal training may enable them acquire relevant skills that may help them deliver a socially responsible televangelism. Besides the conception of informal training programs, fora such as national or international associations of televangelists could be created to serve as

tools for the sensitisation of religious broadcasters on the need to observe socially responsible cultures in the context of televangelism.

Conclusion

Over the years, the concept of televangelism has been globalised thanks to the forces of international media. The originally American concept has spectacularly taken an African coloration, thanks to African televangelists' tendency of embracing various tenets of African Traditional Religion. This adaptation of televangelism is just one of the multiple facets of the enculturation of Christianity in Africa. This paper has explored a number of ways through which televangelism is africanised or indigenised. It argued that this indigenisation has partly been characterised by a number of perversions, some of which include tele-exorcism, fake miracles, dramatisation of preaching and post-truths. These perversions of televangelism amplify a cohort of negative stereotypes about neo-Pentecostal movements in Nigeria and Cameroon. They also call for a thither control of religious media and the conception of capacity building programs that may enable televangelists or aspiring televangelists to be trained in broadcasting and media ethics. Analyses in this paper show that televangelism must conform to media ethics for it to be socially responsible.

This paper has focused on ways in which africanisation enables the perversion of televangelism. Further research may delve into how televangelists respond to criticism against their perversion of televangelism. The present study dwelled essentially on the Nigerian and Cameroonian experiences. Future studies may widen the geographical scope, or focus on other African countries to have a more nuanced understanding of ways in which televangelism is perverted on the continent. Future works may as well dwell on the extent to which specific aspects of American-styled televangelism may be used to overcome the perversions explored in this paper.

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