



LITURGICAL TRANSFORMATION AND THE RISE OF CHARISMATIC WORSHIP IN THE ANGLICAN CHURCH IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This article examines the liturgical transformation occurring within the Anglican Church in Nigeria and the concurrent rise of charismatic worship practices. Drawing on historical, theological, and sociological perspectives, the study explores how Nigerian Anglican worship has shifted from traditional Book of Common Prayer-centred services toward more dynamic, experiential, and charismatic forms. Factors such as the influence of neo-Pentecostal churches, Indigenous Christian Movements, Youth Culture, and Competitive Missional Dynamics are analysed. The article further considers theological implications for Anglican identity, liturgical coherence, and ecclesial unity. While charismatic elements have revitalized worship and contributed to church growth, they equally raise critical questions about liturgical integrity and continuity with historic Anglican theology. The study argues that the Nigerian case represents a distinct form of “Anglocostalism,” whereby Anglicanism retains its structural and sacramental framework while incorporating Pentecostal-like charismatic expression. Ultimately, this shift is framed as a contextual response to the Nigerian spiritual landscape and reflects broader global patterns of charismatic renewal in mainline churches. Recommendations for further theological dialogue and contextual liturgical formation are proposed for sustaining both vibrancy and tradition.

Keywords: Liturgy, Transformation, Charismatic Worship and Anglican Church

Introduction

The Anglican Church in Nigeria, formally known as the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), has long been shaped by liturgical traditions rooted in the historic Book of Common Prayer, episcopal governance, and sacramental worship inherited from its English missionary origins. For much of its early history, worship in Nigerian Anglicanism emphasised structured liturgical forms, careful observance of set prayers, and a rhythm of worship that mirrored classical Anglican practice. However,



in recent decades, a marked transformation has occurred, resulting in the widespread incorporation of charismatic worship elements into Anglican liturgical life. This shift reflects a broader religious evolution within Nigerian Christianity, where charismatic and Pentecostal expressions have proliferated and exerted significant ecclesial influence. Charismatic renewal within Anglican contexts is not unique to Nigeria alone; the global Anglican Communion has witnessed similar movements since the mid-twentieth century. Yet, the Nigerian experience is particularly distinctive due to the rapid expansion of neo-Pentecostal churches and the competitive religious marketplace within which mainline denominations now operate. Scholars have termed the specific Nigerian form of this liturgical and spiritual convergence “Anglocostalism,” capturing the blend of Anglican structure with Pentecostal spirituality. This transformation has prompted both admiration for its spiritual vitality and concern regarding its implications for Anglican liturgical identity and theological coherence. (Barrington,2019)

Contemporary Nigerian Anglican worship often features expressive praise music, spontaneous prayers, healing services, and an emphasis on personal encounter with the Holy Spirit, practices more commonly associated with Pentecostal or charismatic churches. These changes have emerged against a backdrop of evangelical renewal movements among Anglican laity, youth, and clergy, contributing to a shift in worship ethos that prioritises experiential spirituality alongside traditional liturgical elements. This article sets out to examine the historical trajectory, theological rationales, sociocultural drivers, and ecclesial implications of this liturgical transformation, with particular attention to both its opportunities and tensions. In doing so, it engages with key scholarly work on neo-Pentecostal influence, liturgical adaptation, and charismatic Anglican identity. The analysis also explores the ways in which Nigerian Anglicanism has responded to broader spiritual currents negotiating tradition and innovation while maintaining its structural distinctiveness. Ultimately, this study contributes to ongoing conversations about how mainline churches can meaningfully engage contemporary spiritual aspirations without sacrificing theological depth and liturgical heritage. (Barrington, 2019)



Defining the focus

Liturgy

The term liturgy is a concept central to religion, worship, theology, and church history. In its broadest sense, liturgy refers to the structured and communal forms of worship practiced within a religious tradition. It encompasses prayers, readings, rituals, sacraments, music, and ceremonial actions that shape how believers collectively express their faith and devotion to God. Within Christianity, liturgy functions not only as a means of worship but also as a way of transmitting theological beliefs, reinforcing communal identity, and sustaining spiritual life. Etymologically, the word liturgy is derived from the Greek term *leitourgia*, which originally meant “public service” or “work performed for the people.” In ancient Greek, *leitourgia* referred to a service carried out by citizens for the benefit of the community, often at personal expense. Over time, the term was adopted within the religious context of the Greek-speaking Jewish and early Christian communities to describe acts of public worship offered to God. In the Septuagint, the word was used to refer to the ritual duties performed by priests in the temple (Rowan,2003).

In the New Testament, the concept of liturgy appears in several passages where it refers to acts of service or ministry before God. Early Christians gradually adopted the term to describe their gatherings for worship, particularly the celebration of the Eucharist and other sacred rites. As Christianity developed institutional structures, liturgy became a formalized system that organized the worship life of the church. In the early church, liturgy emerged from a combination of Jewish worship traditions and the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. The earliest Christian gatherings included scripture reading, preaching, prayer, and the breaking of bread in remembrance of Christ. These practices gradually developed into structured liturgical forms.

Around the second and third centuries, specific liturgical patterns had to appear in different Christian communities. These included the Liturgy of the Word, which involved the reading and interpretation of scripture, and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, which centered on the sacramental meal commemorating the Last Supper. Over time, these elements became foundational components of Christian worship across many



denominations. Historically, liturgies also developed in various regions, leading to distinct traditions such as the Roman Rite, the Byzantine Rite, and the Alexandrian Rite. Each of these traditions preserved particular theological emphases and cultural expressions of worship (Colin 2004). Although liturgical practices vary among Christian denominations, most liturgies share several common elements:

Prayer: Formal and informal prayers offered by clergy and congregation.

Scripture Readings: Passages from the Bible read during worship.

Sermon or Homily: Interpretation and teaching based on the scriptures.

Sacraments: Sacred rites such as baptism and the Eucharist.

Music and Hymns: Worship expressed through singing and instrumental music.

Ritual Actions: Gestures such as kneeling, standing, or making the sign of the cross.

These elements create a structured pattern that guides believers through acts of confession, praise, thanksgiving, and communion with God.

Over time, different Christian traditions emphasize liturgy in different ways. The Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox Church, and Anglican Communion maintain highly structured liturgical systems with formal prayers, vestments, and sacred calendars. In these traditions, liturgy is seen as the historical continuation of the worship practices of the early church. In contrast, many Protestant and Pentecostal churches place less emphasis on fixed liturgical forms and instead encourage spontaneous expressions of worship. However, even in these contexts, certain patterns of worship, such as opening prayers, preaching, and communal singing, can still be considered liturgical in a broader sense. Beyond its ritual dimension, liturgy serves important theological and social functions. It acts as a medium through which religious beliefs are communicated and internalized by the faithful. Through repeated participation in liturgical acts, believers encounter sacred narratives, symbols, and doctrines that shape their spiritual worldview. Liturgy also strengthens communal identity within the church. Shared rituals foster a sense of belonging and continuity with past generations of believers. In this way, liturgy becomes both a spiritual practice and a cultural tradition that connects faith communities across time and space. In contemporary Christianity, liturgy continues to evolve in response to



cultural, theological, and social changes. Many churches seek to balance traditional liturgical forms with modern expressions of worship, incorporating contemporary music, local languages, and contextual cultural symbols. This process reflects the dynamic nature of liturgy as both a historical inheritance and a living practice. In religious studies and specifically in church history, liturgical study provides valuable insight into how faith communities interpret their beliefs, construct sacred space, and maintain continuity within changing social environments. (Colin, 2004)

Concept of Charismatism and Charismatic Worship

Charismatism here refers to a Christian spiritual orientation that emphasizes the active presence and manifestation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers and the worship life of the church. The term “charismatism” is derived from the Greek word *charisma*, meaning “gift of grace,” which appears in the New Testament to describe spiritual gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit for the edification of the Christian community (1 Corinthians 12:4–11). Within Christian theology, charismatism highlights the belief that the gifts of the Spirit, such as prophecy, healing, speaking in tongues, discernment of spirits, and miracles, are still available and operative in the contemporary church (Yong 2010). Historically, charismatism emerged prominently within twentieth-century Christianity through the broader Pentecostal and charismatic renewal movements. While Pentecostalism began in the early 1900s with revival experiences that emphasized Spirit baptism and speaking in tongues, charismatism later spread into established Christian denominations, including Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, and Lutheran churches (Anderson 2013). This diffusion produced what we may describe in this paper as the “charismatic renewal,” a movement that sought to revitalize traditional churches by reintroducing experiential spirituality and openness to spiritual gifts. In this context, charismatism is understood not as a separate denomination but as a spiritual movement that transcends ecclesiastical boundaries. Its influence can be found in worship styles, prayer practices, and theological emphases that prioritize the direct work of the Holy Spirit in believers’ lives. Charismatic spirituality, therefore, places strong emphasis on personal encounter with God, experiential faith, and the manifestation of spiritual gifts within communal worship (Cartledge 2015). Charismatism also represents a shift in emphasis from purely institutional expressions of Christianity toward a more experiential and



participatory model of faith. Instead of focusing primarily on formal liturgy and doctrinal instruction, charismatic spirituality highlights the transformative power of divine presence experienced through worship, prayer, and ministry. This experiential orientation has contributed significantly to the rapid expansion of charismatic movements across Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia, where religious expressions often value spiritual power and experiential encounter (Mpigi 2014). Furthermore, charismatism is often associated with revivalism and evangelistic zeal. Charismatic communities typically emphasize active evangelism, personal testimony, and missionary outreach, reflecting the belief that the Holy Spirit empowers believers not only for spiritual growth but also for witness and service. These elements contribute to the dynamism and rapid expansion of charismatic Christianity globally (Anderson 2013). However, charismatism has also generated theological debates within Christianity. Critics sometimes question the authenticity of certain charismatic practices, particularly when emotional expression or claims of miraculous experiences appear to overshadow doctrinal reflection. Others caution that excessive emphasis on supernatural manifestations may lead to theological imbalance or commercialization of spirituality. Nevertheless, many theologians argue that charismatic renewal has revitalized Christian worship and reintroduced a biblical emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in the church (Yong 2010).

Nature of Charismatic Worship

Charismatic worship refers to forms of Christian worship that emphasize spontaneity, emotional engagement, and openness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit during worship services. Unlike strictly liturgical worship that follows a fixed order, charismatic worship allows greater flexibility, enabling worship leaders and congregants to respond to perceived movements of the Spirit in real time. This participatory and dynamic character is one of the defining features of charismatic worship across many Christian traditions (Cartledge 2015). One prominent characteristic of charismatic worship is expressive praise and music. Charismatic services often feature contemporary gospel songs, praise choruses, and lively musical accompaniment using instruments such as drums, keyboards, and guitars. Congregants are encouraged to participate actively through singing, clapping, dancing, and raising their hands in worship. This musical expression is not merely



aesthetic but is understood as a spiritual medium through which believers experience the presence of God (Anderson 2013).

Another important element of charismatic worship is spontaneous prayer. Unlike structured liturgical prayers that are read from written texts, charismatic worship often includes extemporaneous prayers offered by individuals or groups within the congregation. Worshippers may pray aloud simultaneously, creating a collective atmosphere of spiritual intensity. This practice reflects the belief that the Holy Spirit directly inspires believers' prayers and enables them to communicate with God in a personal and immediate way (Yong 2010). Charismatic worship also frequently incorporates spiritual gifts such as prophecy, healing prayer, and speaking in tongues. These practices are rooted in New Testament teachings about the gifts of the Spirit and are viewed as manifestations of divine power operating within the worship community. Healing services, prophetic messages, and testimonies of miraculous experiences are common features of charismatic gatherings, reinforcing the belief that God actively intervenes in the lives of believers (Kalu 2008). Testimony is another distinctive feature of charismatic worship. Individuals are often invited to share personal stories of divine intervention, spiritual transformation, or answered prayer. These testimonies serve both as expressions of gratitude and as sources of encouragement for the broader congregation. Through testimony, charismatic communities reinforce a narrative of faith in which God's power is continually experienced in everyday life.

In addition, charismatic worship places strong emphasis on emotional and spiritual engagement. Worshippers are encouraged to express their feelings openly, whether through joyful celebration, tears, or moments of deep spiritual reflection. This emotional dimension is interpreted not as mere sentimentality but as evidence of an authentic encounter with the Holy Spirit. As a result, charismatic worship environments often cultivate a strong sense of communal unity and shared spiritual experience. Another notable aspect of charismatic worship is the role of the worship leader or minister as a facilitator of spiritual encounter. Rather than strictly adhering to a predetermined order of service, worship leaders may adapt the flow of the service in response to perceived spiritual direction. This flexibility allows space for extended worship, prayer ministry, or prophetic exhortation, reflecting the charismatic belief



that the Holy Spirit actively guides the worship experience. In many parts of the world today, particularly in Nigeria, charismatic worship has become a dominant expression of Christianity. Even historically liturgical churches increasingly incorporate charismatic elements such as praise sessions, healing prayers, and testimony times into their services. This phenomenon reflects the broader transformation of global Christianity, where experiential spirituality and vibrant worship practices play a central role in shaping religious life (Kalu 2008).

Historical Development of the Rise of Charismatic and Influences in Nigerian Anglicanism

The roots of charismatic influence within Nigerian Anglicanism trace back to early indigenous Christian movements that emphasized prayer, spiritual gifts, and personal encounter with God. One prominent figure was Cornelius Adam Igbudu (1914–1981), an Anglican evangelist whose ministry emphasized healing, evangelism, and Holy Spirit empowerment within Anglican communities. Igbudu's work, particularly through the Anglican Adam Preaching Society, catalyzed a wave of spiritual renewal that blurred traditional liturgical forms with experiential spiritual engagement (Christopher, 2008).

During the latter part of the twentieth century, Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches gained rapid momentum in Nigeria, attracting large numbers of worshippers through dynamic preaching, healing services, and promises of spiritual and material breakthrough. These churches, characterized by vibrant music, spontaneous prayer, and an emphasis on the immediate presence of the Holy Spirit, contrasted starkly with the more ordered and formal worship of traditional mainline denominations. In response, many Nigerian Anglicans began to incorporate similar practices not simply out of mimicry but as a strategic and contextual response to a shifting religious environment (Christopher, 2008). Scholars have argued that this process should not be seen merely as imitation but as contextual adaptation. The traditional Anglican liturgical framework proved flexible enough to accommodate elements such as lively praise music, prophetic prayer, and extended ministry times. Over time, these charismatic infusions became integrated into regular Sunday services, revival programmes, and diocesan worship events. By the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, many Nigerian Anglican churches began to reflect a hybrid



worship identity, one that honoured the episcopal and sacramental structure of Anglicanism while embracing the vibrancy and spiritual dynamism associated with charismatic Christianity (Christopher, 2008). This historical progression was influenced by both internal renewal movements among Anglican youth and clergy and external pressures from a rapidly growing Pentecostal landscape. For example, many Anglican youth organisations in Nigeria interacted with charismatic expressions through campus fellowships, inter-denominational prayer groups, and student ministries, further accelerating the liturgical diffusion of charismatic practices into Anglican worship. By the 1990s and 2000s, the adoption of charismatic elements became normative in many dioceses across the country, representing a significant shift from earlier worship paradigms. (David, and Peter, 1981)

Theological Foundations of Charismatic Worship in the Anglican Context

Charismatic worship within Nigerian Anglicanism rests on theological concepts that prioritize the work and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Traditional Anglican theology affirms the presence of the Spirit in sacraments, prayer, and mission. However, charismatic theology accentuates spontaneous Spirit-led ministry, personal spiritual empowerment, and the visibility of spiritual gifts such as healing, prophecy, and speaking in tongues. These emphases have profound liturgical implications, reshaping worship towards an encounter-centred experience. A central theological rationale for incorporating charismatic practices within Anglican worship is the desire to deepen the believer's spiritual experience. For proponents of charismatic Anglicanism, expressive worship and openness to spiritual gifts offer tangible signs of divine presence and power, reinforcing faith and community vitality. Many Nigerian Anglican clergy affirm that these practices do not contradict Anglican doctrine but rather enrich worship by making the liturgy more responsive to the Spirit's movement (Bates 2020). Theologically, Nigerian Anglican charismatic worship often frames liturgy around an experiential understanding of salvation, healing, and transformation. This stands in contrast with a solely sacrament-centred view of worship that emphasises order, ritual, and historical liturgical texts. Yet, advocates maintain that charismatic expressions can coexist with core Anglican theological affirmations, integrating experiential spirituality with liturgical structure. Thus, many Anglican liturgies in Nigeria now exhibit a blend of set prayers, responsive readings, and



spontaneous prayer segments, creating a hybrid theological expression that resonates with contemporary worshippers (Bates 2020). Critics, however, have raised concerns that such theological adaptation risks diluting historic Anglican commitments, particularly the centrality of the Eucharist and liturgical order. They caution against over-emphasising individual spiritual experience at the expense of communal sacramental life. These divergent theological positions underscore an ongoing conversation within the Church of Nigeria about how best to balance tradition with renewal, doctrinal fidelity with spiritual vitality (Bates 2020)

Sociocultural Drivers of Liturgical Transformation

The liturgical transformation in Nigerian Anglicanism is deeply embedded in broader sociocultural shifts. Urbanization, youth demographic growth, and heightened religious competition have created a context where expressive, dynamic worship resonates with contemporary spiritual aspirations. Many Nigerian youths, in particular, find traditional liturgy insufficiently engaging, gravitating instead towards worship forms that emphasize emotional expression, music, and direct experience with God. Charismatic Anglican worship responds to these preferences by offering vibrant music, interactive prayer, and visible manifestations of spiritual gifts that many young believers find meaningful. Furthermore, the influence of mass media and technology has amplified the visibility of charismatic worship in Nigeria. Television, radio, and digital platforms broadcast Pentecostal services into homes across the country, shaping expectations about worship style and spiritual engagement. As a result, Nigerian Anglicans are both exposed to and influenced by these charismatic expressions, which then find their way into Anglican worship settings. (Bates 2020). The sociocultural climate in Nigeria, marked by economic uncertainty and a strong belief in the supernatural, also contributes to the appeal of charismatic worship. Practices such as healing prayer, deliverance services, and prophetic ministry address deeply held spiritual needs and offer hope to adherents navigating complex life challenges. Anglican charismatic worship with its emphasis on divine intervention, spiritual empowerment, and hope in adversity aligns with these cultural expectations and spiritual longings. This sociocultural synergy between charismatic worship and Nigerian religious sensibilities has facilitated liturgical transformation, enabling Anglican communities to remain relevant and missionally effective in a rapidly



changing religious landscape. However, it also raises questions about authenticity and theological grounding, especially when certain charismatic practices mirror elements found in sectarian or prosperity-themed movements (Bates 2020).

Liturgical Expressions of Charismatic Anglican Worship

In practice, charismatic Anglican worship in Nigeria manifests through several liturgical expressions that contrast with traditional Anglican forms. Contemporary praise music, often led by praise teams with amplified instruments, has replaced organ-based hymnody in many congregations. Songs are chosen not only for theological content but also for their capacity to evoke emotional response and congregational participation. Spontaneous prayer segments have become common, with congregants called to pray aloud, share testimonies, or engage in prophetic declarations during services. This participatory emphasis stands in contrast to the scripted nature of the traditional Anglican liturgy, where predefined prayers and readings structure worship. Healing and deliverance services have also been incorporated, either as part of regular Sunday worship or as separate programmes. These services emphasize divine intervention, spiritual breakthrough, and testimony sharing elements more typical of Pentecostal or charismatic gatherings than conventional Anglican liturgy (William, 2002). Additionally, extended ministry times at the end of services, characterized by prayer for personal needs, spiritual impartation, and prophetic encouragement, reflect a shift toward encounter-oriented worship. These liturgical adaptations have made Anglican worship more accessible to those accustomed to charismatic expressions while challenging the classic hierarchical and sacramental formality previously dominant.

Tensions, Opportunities, and Theological Implications

The rise of charismatic worship in Nigerian Anglicanism has generated both opportunities and tensions. On the positive side, charismatic elements have revitalized congregational engagement, attracted new worshippers, and fostered a sense of spiritual empowerment among members. Churches that embrace such worship styles often report growth in attendance, youth involvement, and spiritual enthusiasm. However, theological tensions arise regarding the place of tradition in liturgical life.



Critics argue that over-emphasis on individual spiritual experience and spontaneous forms may diminish the historical and sacramental dimensions of Anglican identity. They caution against the erosion of theological depth against emotional expression (William,2002). A key concern is the centrality of the Eucharist within Anglican theology. While charismatic worship emphasizes spiritual gifts and experiential encounter, the Eucharist remains the heart of Anglican liturgical theology. Balancing charismatic elements with liturgical centrality poses a theological challenge requiring careful articulation of doctrine and worship priorities. Another tension involves ecumenical identity. As Nigerian Anglican worship increasingly resembles Pentecostal forms, questions arise about what distinguishes Anglican liturgy from other Christian expressions. Maintaining a distinctive Anglican witness rooted in both scripture and tradition while embracing renewal requires ongoing theological reflection, contextual liturgical formation, and ecclesial dialogue (William, 2002).

Conclusion

The liturgical transformation and rise of charismatic worship in the Anglican Church in Nigeria represent a significant evolution in the church's worship life. This shift reflects both contextual adaptation to Nigeria's spiritual climate and a genuine search for deeper encounter with the Holy Spirit. While charismatic expressions have invigorated Anglican worship and contributed to church growth, they equally raise important questions about liturgical identity, theological integrity, and ecclesial coherence. The Nigerian case of "Anglocostalism" illustrates how mainline churches can navigate the intersection of tradition and innovation, integrating elements of charismatic spirituality without forsaking core Anglican commitments. Yet, this integration is not without challenges. Balancing experiential worship with sacramental theology, maintaining distinct Anglican identity amidst charismatic convergence, and fostering theological depth alongside spiritual vibrancy are ongoing tasks for the Church of Nigeria. Ultimately, the liturgical transformation within Nigerian Anglicanism offers both opportunity and urgency for theological reflection and ecclesial dialogue. By consciously articulating the theological foundations of worship, engaging with the cultural drivers of liturgical change, and preserving the sacramental heart of Anglican theology, the Church can steward its liturgical heritage while remaining responsive to the Holy Spirit's work in contemporary society.



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