African Pentecostal Churches and Proliferation of Churches in Nigeria.

By

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Abstract

The African Pentecostal Church also known as Evangelical Charismatic Movement, emerged through individual talents and religious charismatic sagacious leadership. It often starts from prayer meetings, house-fellowships or group talks in religious programmes, to eventual conviction of the leader that he has the anointing as a 'man of God'. In course of time, the leader also receive the calling to open a new church. This unfortunate trend has remained unchecked as every one that can read and interpreted the Bible claim to be called. He holds claim of being divinely directed to establish a revival mission, to a purported loss of spiritual vigor and commitment in his former older church. This study observed that a greater number of Nigeria's churches are in this typology. They are also the most prolific brand of NRMs. This work adopted the analyzed descriptive and phenomenological method of data collection and interpretation in arriving at its finding. The finding reveals that the negative effects brought about by the proliferation of churches seem to be overriding the good side of it which is reflecting in the current situation in the country where corruption and moral decadence are the order of the day. It is sad and disheartening that the springing up of churches nowadays has failed to stop or even reduce moral decadence in the society which ought to be the major role and impact of churches in our society. Many so called prophets see their churches as a means of livelihood which has portrayed our society as not upright and peaceful. This work recommends that a check mechanism be put in place to distinguish between those who are genuinely called, and the fake and self-called ones.

Keywords: African Pentecostal Churches, Proliferation, NRMs, Moral Decadence, Nigeria.

Introduction

Nigeria as a secular state affords every citizen freedom to exercise their faith and carry out their religious obligations without restrictions. This provision is enshrined in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2012), as amended.

Section 38: 1, of the Nigerian Constitution states that:

> Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

The constitution gives each person the right to follow any religion and denomination of his/her choice, and the freedom to make such belief or religion known through worship and practice. That is why according to Adesanya (2011) "places of worship are built". It is based on the exercise of this freedom of worship that we see many churches springing up and littered all over the place, and on daily basis in contemporary Nigeria.

According to Trigg (2012) freedom of religious practices has taken many individuals to several places with the aim of satisfying their spiritual hunger. These churches no doubt has contributed to the enrichment and satisfaction of the spiritual hunger and needs of both members and non-members. Through their unique way of worship and philanthropic activities, they have impacted on the lives of millions of Nigerians.

This work seeks to evaluate some conceptions that seem to encourage the proliferation of churches especially the African Indigenous Pentecostal churches in Nigeria. Adesanya (2004) observed that proliferation would have encouraged and enhanced national development in areas of life, but the reverse is the case in recent times. This is seen by the work on variance created between the proliferated

churches and the behavioral pattern, which is consequently reflected on the Nigeria's socio-economic and political development. We have in recent times seen how Pentecostal churches in Nigeria compete among themselves for dominance. Most times, members of different Pentecostal churches in Nigeria engage in serious verbal vituperation over variation in spiritual doctrines and ways of worship. This is a challenge of our time.

Conceptual Framework

African Pentecostal churches are an old concept in Christianity, which could be traced back to the America colonies and Britain in the eighteenth century (Burgess, 2008). It was known as new Christian group, breaking from already established Christian churches or missionary, with the purpose of solving one social, religious, political or economic problem which it considered very important. This actually contributed to what led to the emergence of the new religious movement, and as time progressed the Africans felt they should be in total control of their church, and worship God in the African way. It was based on this background that African Pentecostal churches emerged.

African Pentecostal churches are also classified as new religious movements and were started with the notion that the existing Christian churches did not address prevailing social issues at stake. These churches were given so many kinds of names, depending on their origin or historic period such as "Ethiopian charismatic' 'Spiritual Church' 'Aladura Church' 'Prophetic Church', and 'Neo-Pentecostal" (Burgress, 2008).

New religious movement otherwise known as African Indigenous churches have a Pentecostal outlook which made Aladejo (2005) to talk about them as "a Pentecostal brand of Christianity". According to Oladeji (2005), when new religious movements appeared, the already established churches of Orthodox and Protestant tradition condemned and rejected their emergence, owing to the fact that they saw them as having an aim that was contrary to the original doctrine of the Bible and the Orthodox foundational principles. They saw the indigenous Christian groups as being emotional in nature and heretical in teaching. Apart from being cohesively organized with in-group consciousness, new religious

movement demand loyalty and obligatory fellowship in a regimental pattern that is sometimes placed high above family responsibilities.

African Pentecostal churches according to Anyacho (2009), refer to those churches which came into being within 1930's in Africa with African leaders as founders. The founders of these churches were African people who asserted their freedom from the mainstream churches. They are called African Independent Churches (AIC), and represent those churches that were founded during the rise of Pentecostalism in Nigeria.

The concept "new" implies that such churches are not among the mainstream churches which came with the Western missionaries but were founded by the Africans within the 1930s. Commenting on the rise of the New Religious Movements in Nigeria, Iheanacho (2008) opined that new religious movement is a general term used to spotlight the relatively newer movements. They are new because they manifest and proclaim practices which are relatively new to older churches. The word "new" is used because in historical consideration, they are newer to either orthodox Christianity, or Islam and the relative newness of their doctrines, liturgy and ideologies.

Iheanacho (2008) further posits that new religious movements or African Pentecostal churches is a term used for African independent churches or African indigenous churches to show the absence of institutionalized authority which exact external influence in her activities like the mainline churches or the missionary founded churches. More so, the term African Pentecostal churches show that most of the churches have indigenous connection in their formation. Thus, they are self-sustaining, self-supporting, self-propagating and the founders are usually the sole administrators popularly known as General Overseer.

Baker (2012) went back to memory lane to assert that African Pentecostal church or new religious movement as they are usually called are used to cover a desperate collection of organization which emerged in their present form since 1950's and most of which offer some answers to questions that are fundamentally religious, spiritual or philosophical in nature. According to Baker, new religious movement

is a title to cover organizations which are religious in formation since 1950's and have answers to contemporary questions of the society.

Factors that led to the emergence of African Pentecostal churches in Nigeria.
Falk (1997) notes that the quest for political independence was a driving force that contributed to the emergence of African Pentecostal churches. Thus in Zaire (former Belgian Congo) for instance, Prophet Simon Kimbangu's Religious movement was known for being involved as a nationalist agent of independence struggle. Falk further observed that there was also the religious cause which is the need to Africanize Christianity. The desire to indigenize Christian liturgy and practice and to make it internalized by the Africans is another reason for the birth of African Pentecostal churches. The African Christian groups are pre-occupied with the task of presenting the gospel in the African perspective.

According to Iheanacho (2008) recalcitrance is one of the reasons that actually led to the emergence of African Pentecostal churches. Thus African Pentecostal churches were founded by people who previously, as members of their former churches were to face disciplinary action because of what was termed as a 'recalcitrant behavior' by them. They broke away as disciplinary actions were to be taken against them for wrong deeds done against set doctrines and practices. Rather than subjecting themselves to the church council and such disciplinary actions meted out on them, they broke away and founded their own Christian religious movements. The influence the founders of these churches had enabled them to organize people of similar plight and feelings to form a parallel and independent group. They did this by affirming that the parent church or group is no longer on the right track, hence the leaders of the breakaway group have received a fresh mandate and anointing to revive and reform the people back to God.

Doctrinal violation and suspension were also reasons for the emergence of the African Pentecostal Churches. According to Burgess (2008), the Apostolic Faith Church expelled Pastor William Folorunso Kumuyi in 1977 over his evangelistic activities and for preaching without ordination certification. They also disagreed with Kumuyi on his emphasis on healing, believing that sickness could be given to believers as a form of discipline. After his excommunication, Kumuyi did not

join another denomination neither did he intend to start a new church. He rather started a prayer cell movement. However, it was clear that a new Christian movement was about to emerge and in 1982, Deeper Life Bible Church held its first Sunday service in Lagos. The following year, Kumuyi gave up his job as Lecturer, to become the fulltime General Overseer of Deeper Life Bible Church. Burgress (2008) adds that, although W.F Kumuyi is an outstanding preacher who uses all available facilities to reach out to people, it was to his credit that taped sermons, tracks projectors, satellite communication gadgets and booklets were used to spread the gospel. His teaching has permeated the mainline or mission founded denominations and shaped its own vision and values as a way of building on the New Christian Religious movement in Nigeria.

Revival movement in Nigeria is another factor that led to the emergence of African Pentecostal churches. This is the idea of renewal and revival among the African Christians. Iheanacho (2008) mentioned that Christian converts embraced the faith with the hope of attaining personal liberation, identity and independence, oriented in love which is heralded in experience of direct communion with Christ. Failure to realize this motive in a given church led to "Looking elsewhere" to find or contact such religious fulfillment. Consequently, the situation resulted into separation and formation of new Christian movement to fill the vacuum.

Another dimension to this cause has been the opposition by the mainline church leaders. This opposition has been official, well organized and sponsored with a view to eliminating the new religious movement. The founders of the New African churches were tagged as 'sheep stealers', 'tithe thieves', 'coveters', 'spreaders of heresies', etc. They were also called preachers of superficial, diluted and popular Christianity through prosperity gospel. The mainline church leaders also declared that the founders of the new churches were false prophets, money mongers and cultists who were using satanic powers to perform miracles.

The need to Africanize Christianity was also a factor that led to the emergence of the New African churches. Many Africans did not see good reasons why Europeans refuse to consider African culture and tradition in their bid to Christianize Africa. The Africans needed Christianity with an African coloration where Christianity will be packaged and encased within the African culture.

Ayegboyin and Ishola (1997) state that Africans desired to have a Christianity that is Africanized and that is practically down to earth, which reflects deep down the African beliefs, doctrines and which responds to the problems of the African congregation. They have seen that missionary Christianity with European culture manifestation was too foreign to meet some pressing demands of the Africans. They needed Christianity that will handle aspects of African culture such as their beliefs in the evil, witchcraft, dreams and interpretation of dreams, trance and visions. They also needed Christianity to encourage their polygamy, rituals, bathing in flowing streams and or rivers and when they are not getting this from the mainline church, majority of the Africans left to form their own new religious movement which is classified as African churches.

The need to have Pentecostal churches that will pay good attention to the missing link in African Christianity was another factor that led to the emergence of the new churches. Peel (1968) observed that the early African churches among the Yoruba of Nigeria had a motive of conciliation. The founders of the new churches claimed that the missionary churches were still exotic institutions and would remain so until led by Africans. They purge themselves of their adventitious and essential European cultural trappings. They noted that for a lasting impact on the people, churches must be hinged on and oriented in the cultural milieu of its host or social environment.

According to Ayegbayin and Ishola (1997), after the First World War in 1918 the cure of influenza became a serious concern for some Christians in Yoruba land. They expressed disappointment in the leadership of the mission churches which seemed to be helpless in the face of this disaster. Following this, the Aladura (Prayer Church) movement emerged in Yoruba to solve this social problem of influenza epidemic. Those Christians believed that the epidemic was a natural disaster which could be solved through prayers, hence, this movement. To a large extent it could be said that the African solution to that problem worked.

Impact of proliferation of churches

According to Olusegun (2020), "churches are noted to be springing up at an alarming and unprecedented rate in all available spaces, shops, warehouses, hotels, sitting rooms, uncompleted building, both private and public school

premises to mention a few". He further asserts that the major church proliferation was observed at the end of 1973 revivals and crusades that served as an avenue through which Pentecostalism was introduced into the country. Adamolekun (2012), says that "the resultant effect was the springing up of new churches out of the parent churches on basis of lack of divine healing, baptism of the Holy Spirit and other Pentecostal manifestation in parent churches". He further noted that some of the churches established were for genuine reason of evangelism such as Deeper Life Bible Church, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Gospel Faith Mission etc., while some were established for commercial purposes which has led to the uncontrolled birth of proliferation of churches.

The rate of church proliferation in Nigeria is so high that one finds a minimum of fifty different churches on a street of few kilometers. There are cases where there are more than three churches in the same building, sharing the same space, in urban cities; with each blasting their public address systems in a bid to out- shine the others (Olusegun, 2020). This situation may have prompted the columnist of the Nigeria News Point (2015) to assert that "Nigeria is a country with the largest number of churches per capital in the world and that Nigeria has become a fertile soil for the growth of independent churches". Many unemployed persons proclaimed themselves pastors, taking advantage of freedom of worship to launch new churches, religious organizations and societies. They claim to be called by God, when in actual fact they are there to seek for a means of livelihood. These self-acclaimed pastors and prophets encourage such vices in the society like, robbery, stealing, corrupt practices and crimes of varied magnitude by praying for members that brought or donated huge amount of money as gifts or worship offerings without ascertaining the source of such donations.

Olabode (2001) queries "why church proliferation in Nigeria is without a matching expected impact in societal development and boasting of moral standard". Ordinarily, one would expect that Nigerians would be very moral people considering the number of churches there, but the reverse is the case compared to the level of crime and criminality that is found in the country. Meanwhile, there are always different perspectives of concepts among scholars over common issues which does not exclude the concept of proliferation of African Pentecostal churches.

Olusegun (2020), observed that:

> The negative effects brought about by the proliferation of churches seem to be overriding the good side of it which is reflecting in the current situation in the country where corruption and moral decadence are the order of the day.… It is sad and disheartening that the springing up of churches nowadays fails to stop or reduce moral decadence in the society which ought to be the major impact of churches in our society. Many people were using the spreading of churches like wild fire for means of livelihood which flicked in our society for not becoming upright and not peaceful.

This rapid multiplication of churches according to Ibiyinka (2011) is borne out of the understanding that there is freedom of religious worship in Nigeria. The society is witnessing proliferation of churches which has brought changes in values, created job opportunities, and established educational institutions and hospitals. Obiefuna et al. (2010) maintains that African Pentecostal churches have in many ways contributed immensely to social, economic, educational and religious development of Nigeria. For them, individuals are relieved from their economic problems; the less privileged are revitalized and given hope; there is improvement on the ethical and moral standard of the nation; unemployed youths are meaningfully employed; and the rate of suicide as regards to depression has drastically reduced.

Adamolekun (2012) pointed out that:

> One of the major positive social impacts of church growth which led to church proliferation is seen in the number of churches all over the country that established Nursery and Primary Schools, Secondary Schools and Universities which provided job opportunities for many people, likewise Teaching Hospitals and Mission Hospitals are also established by these churches that provided good health care services and job opportunities to many people … People with different kind of spiritual and physical problems got solutions to their problems through revivals and crusades organized by these churches that brought healing, deliverance from the bondage of oppressing powers and miracles.

> It makes people to realize that Nigeria is very religious and that many Christian churches abound in the country.

According to Olusegun (2020), another impact of this proliferation is the formation of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) which stands as a pressure group and an umbrella which Christians use as a mouth-piece to fight any injustice or government policies that are against the interest of the Christians in the nation. Other reasons for proliferation include: rapid evangelization, development of new leadership, provision of check and balance to orthodox churches, promotion of specialization in ministry and; enhancing the provision of an atmosphere in which human problems are addressed.

In trying to juxtapose the rate of proliferation of churches in Nigeria with its contribution to societal development, some scholars like Alpheus (2007), Diara and Onah (2004). Obiora (2001). Amucheazi (1986), Marshal (2009), are of the opinion that church proliferation is based on people's quest for materialism, fame, identification and respect from members of the communities.

Based on the assertion of the above named scholars, it can be said that proliferation of churches especially African Pentecostal churches is motivated by the quest for dishonest gain and desire for self-respect from members of the society.

Authorities and Leading Clerics in proliferation of churches

According to Boom (1975), when those in authority in the church make things difficult for people to worship God, then others who want to worship God freely decided to go where they will have freedom to worship God. In support of this, Burgess (2005) said that the main reason for schism and secession was opposition from mainline church authorities and especially the Anglican Church. He said that most of the early leaders of grace of God mission for example, were former Anglicans. Generally, the leaders rejected the revivals and persecuted those who participated. They criticized them for their aggressive evangelistic style, their promotion of Holy Spirit baptism and charismatic gifts of tongues and prophecy, their interdenominational stance and their emphasis upon personal holiness.

According to Ilega and Iheanacho (2008), formal education was planned for the new converts to initiate them into some basic teaching of Christian faith, thus, the elementary, secondary, teachers training and technical colleges were built. These includes Hope waddle training institute, Calabar on 21st May, 1894, a co-education school, and an institute that was a complex with tripartite function, which are to give sound secondary education, to give a careful industrial training in various handcraft, and to prepare teachers, evangelist and pastors to meet the spiritual and educational needs of the country.

Mission schools like Hope Waddel Training Institute Calabar, Edgerly Memorial Secondary School Calabar, Union Secondary School Ibiaku, Union Training College Ogbanelin, Arochukwu, Macgregor College Afikpo; Calabar and Ohafia Teachers Training Colleges, Okrika Grammar School, Okrika, Archdeacon Crowther Memorial Girls School, Elelenwo etc, have helped reproduce people to carry on the work. Thousands of notable Nigerians owe their success in life to these mission schools. Such persons include Dr. Akanu Ibiam (Former Governor of Eastern Nigeria) Elder Edidem Usang, Dr. Alvan Ikoku, Professor Eric Njoku, Dr.Nnamdi Azikwe (former President), Chief Dennis Osadebe, (Former Governor of Midwest), Professor Godwin Tasie, and many others are beneficiaries of Mission Schools training.

Again, Christianity left behind some structures for continuity in Nigeria (Owete, 2008). These structures according to Akin Omoyajowo and some others published articles on religious studies. This included the fight by some Africans to Africanize Christianity. This recognition according to the ways of life and culture of African is in the acts of worship by way of using local drums. More so, African language, idioms, composing Christian songs for worship and adoring God in the African language, affirmation of Christian faith in the African language and the documentation of the scripture and other Christian messages in the African language are ways to show that new religious movement has a prospect in Nigeria.

Finally, the building of health institutions like dispensaries, hospitals, and leprosaria was also a factor. It should be noted that once these new churches had achieved opening one their founders were addressed with one big title or the other, such as Prophet, Apostle, Bishop, General Overseer and they start seeing

visions, performing miracles and prophesying for their members. In the course of preaching the gospel ,many of them cannot make a sentence without making one prophetic utterance of prosperity and when such prophesies are not fulfilled, they acquire false power to make accurate prediction in order to be regarded as real men of God. These "Pastors" according to Igbokwe, have caused a lot of harm and havoc to families through their prophetic utterances and visions all in the name of proliferation of churches.

Igbokwe further posits that the proliferation of churches should be checkmated because it is appalling that a country as religious as Nigeria does not benefit positively from the massive springing up of churches. To him, this means that these churches have not made much positive impact. It is on this note that he challenged churches that are growing every day to eradicate corruption and bring a new Nigeria that can be tagged a corruption free Nigeria. To him, the growth of churches should bring up leaders and government with the fear of God.

Irekamba (2005) in his work "Why is crime on the increase despite innumerable churches and Mosques" asserts that the fundamental purpose of any religion is to make the adherent pious and upright. Nigeria is a country that has innumerable churches which would have produced saints in the society; however, the reverse is the case. He noted that amidst these churches increasing every day, many heinous crimes like corruption, kidnapping, ritual killing, human trafficking, prostitution, armed robbery and fraud are so common in the society. Most Nigerians are religious in appearance as reported by Irekamba (2005).

Yussuf (2016) in his work '*Most Nigerian are religious in appearance'* posits that many Nigerians pay lip service to God and this has made evil to continue unabated. He notes that people openly exhibit their allegiance to religious bodies and pretend to be faithful Christians but when it comes to practicing what they profess, the reverse becomes the case. In action one hardly sees any religious sign because of the high rate of vices despite the increase of churches. Following from this, one can easily say that Nigerians are only religious in appearance and religion has no place of abode in their hearts.

Yusuf (2016) further states that no religion will encourage her adherents to do evil and if all these churches being flooded are really condemning evil, why then is evil on the increase? This, to him means that the churches may have left their purpose and mission and in turn become dead churches and because of this, their impact is not felt. Based on this, instead of correcting wrong doing and condemning evil, the churches have turned condole and support them, which invariably negates what the society expects from them. To him, the essence of churches is to maintain sanity among the people in the society and they should endeavor to live up to this expectation.

Conclusion

Nigeria is a fertile ground where independent and Pentecostal churches grow rapidly because the people are highly religious. This work examine the negative and positive impact of these churches represented by the African Pentecostal Churches to national life. In this regard, this work gives a holistic view of Nigeria as a nation with regard to how she handles the issue of church proliferation. It is important to state that Nigeria is one of the countries that allow freedom of worship of her citizens because of its embodiment in the constitution. Thus, people move from place to place in their quest to satisfy their spiritual hunger, which gives rise to a continuous proliferation. This work traced the impact made by these African Pentecostal churches which is basically to Africanize Christianity and in a bid to curve out a good life of affluence for the founder other than making the society a better place to live in.

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