

Proliferation of Churches and Phenomenal Moral Decadence in Nigeria: The Socio-Economic Implications

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This paper focused on moral decadence in Nigeria in spite of the proliferation of churches with a focus on Pentecostal ministries, from a humanistic point of view. The study depended mostly on secondary data in an attempt to study this phenomenon. Both negative and positive impact of Pentecostalism in Nigeria were presented. It also indicated several manifestations of moral decadence in spite of church growth and its causal factors. The study also looked at the economic and sociological implications of church proliferation with moral decadence. The study ends with concluding remarks.

Keywords: Moral Decadence, Proliferation of Churches, Socio-economic implications, Nigeria

Introduction

God is interested in church growth and the piety of every member of the church according to the Bible (Proverbs 14:28; Acts 4:13). Thus, Christians are supposed to showcase all the embodiment of Godliness. The rise in the number of churches in any society therefore should correspond with developing interest in the fear of the Lord for a Godly living to ensure societal development. Christians are supposed to live exemplary lives (Matthew 5:13; John 1:5) that should warrant a just society. That is why the above scriptures describe them as the light and the salt of the earth. From all indications, the reverse seems to be the case in Africa, and this is increasingly becoming worrisome to scholars across the continent (Gbote and Kgatla, 2014; Ogiugo, 2015). In sub-Saharan Africa, Mfumbusa (2010), contends there has been a remarkable increase in the number of churches and a commensurate rise in corruption and other social vices. It is assumed that if churches are increasing, its positive impact in the lives of its people should be greater than when there were few churches. Mfumbusa (2010) therefore wondered if the church growth and rise in corruption are contentious in these societies. Scholars and other agencies (Nigerianeye, 2013; United Nations Office on Drug and Crime-UNODC, 2015) who studied this phenomenon seem to agree that; initially, when Christianity was first introduced in West African countries, it had the impact of leading people to holiness than contemporarily when the reverse is the case. In Nigeria, other

writers such as Kalu, 1978; Obiora, 2001a; Ekenne, 2001; Alghabus, 2001; Achunike, 2004; Diara and Onah, 2014) also all seem to agree that little improvement has been recorded in attitude, behaviour, and comportment of Christians though the number of churches has risen astronomically. Consequently, indecent activities of most Nigerians have caused the nation to be constantly ranked high in the corruption index (Ejike, 2014; Ifoh, 2014; Mohammed, 2015).

So far, the Nigerian government is either not doing anything about this problem or that efforts put in place to curtail moral decadence are weak and have failed to yield the requisite results. The following reasons could account for the seemingly unwillingness and the inability of the government to bring about solution to moral decadence which some authors have attributed to the underdevelopment of Nigeria (Dike, 2008; Philip and Akangbe, 2013; Olatunji and Mohammed, 2013).

- Most government officials attend Pentecostal churches where emphasis against corruption is very poor.
- Most Pentecostal churches generate their income from donations, tithes, and offerings of top government functionaries (Faleye, 2013).
- Nigerian top government officials seek divine protection and other sundry solutions to their problems in Pentecostal churches (Dare, Nwodo, Onyewere and Ezechukwu; 2016).

In spite of all the above cited literature, it should be admitted that enough scholarly attention has not been devoted to the understanding of the causes of high moral depravity in the face of rising number of churches. However, the study of Adesanya (2011) which dealt with the same topic was restricted to the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG). More importantly, the study was severely limited because it focused mainly on environmental factors, hence this study.

This study intends to: Examine the origin of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria; the impact of Pentecostal ministries; look into the manifestation of moral decadence in Pentecostal ministries; explore the causes of the rise in moral depravity; find out the factors responsible for this menace; and ex-ray the economic and social implications of church growth without piety.

The Origin of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria

One of the instruments which the Colonial Administration used to dominate and win the minds of people in the colonies was Christian religion. At that period, Christianity preached messages of eternity via holiness and righteousness. Thus, deliverance and salvation of people from some obnoxious African customs, traditions, and practices such as the killing of twin babies and people with hunchbacks, human sacrifice, worshipping idols, etc were evidence and appealed to a broad segment of the African society during colonialism. These seem to have accounted for the dramatic rise of churches in Africa especially in Nigeria where people had suffered greatly prior to the advent of Christianity.

After independence in 1960, the influence of Pentecostal churches in the United States of America began to permeate Africa. By the year 2001 in Nigeria, there were 1018 Pentecostal ministries (Obiora, 2001a). Kalu (1978) categorized them into nine groups based on their teachings and orientations. However, the line of demarcation between them is between followership and churches on one hand and between holiness and prosperity groups on the other hand (Ejike, 2014). In other words, the focus of each ministry is different but no matter the focus, holiness should be the bed rock of

each of them in such a way to endure greater impact on national development. Although this view seems to be contrary to the reality on development, some of the obvious positive impacts of these ministries are discussed below.

Impact of Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria

Literature reveals that Christianity has significantly contributed to the progress of many Nigerians since its introduction (Obiora, 2001b). Prior to colonialism which brought about its introduction, many obnoxious cultural practices were evident in African societies. It was after its introduction in the wake of colonialism that Christian religion began to counter several obnoxious and some age-long practices, customs, and traditions useless for the salvation and deliverance of many people. Some dehumanizing widowhood practices, wife inheritance and human sacrifice were condemned for the first time. People began to frown at the practice of interring living people with dead monarchs as a sign of respect. But the work of Owoye and Aluko (2014) and Gabriel (2015) showed that the work of Christianity expanded by establishing some of these universities such as.

S/N	Pentecostal Ministries	Universities
1.	Baptist Church	Bowen University
2.	Living Faith Church	Covenant University
3.	Christian Faith University	Benson Idahosa University
4.	Seventh-day Adventist Church in Nigeria	Babcock University
5.	Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG)	Redeemers University
6.	Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)	Ajayi Crowther University
7.	Catholic Church	Madonna University

Moreover, some programmes of study created by some Pentecostal universities that were not in existence in tertiary institutions in the country in the past such as entrepreneurial studies have been successfully introduced into the nation's teaching curriculum. Apart from this, one of the private faith-based universities in Nigeria is often rated as the best university in Nigeria by the Global Ranking Web of Universities (Ransng, 2013) e.g., Covenant university. Further to the above, these educational institutions provide employment

opportunities for some persons. This has to some extent reduced the rate of unemployment (Trading Economics, 2016; Onyemenam, 2013) responsible for abject poverty (Ngwahu, 2014; Onodugo, 2015) and criminal activities such as smuggling, robbery, prostitution, stealing, etc among Nigerians.

Apart from the above, missionaries from the West introduced formal education to Nigerians but it has not been established in literature that any missionary in developed countries has ever established and run a tertiary institution in Nigeria especially after Independence. Besides, at its early stage, Christianity was mainly characterized by spirituality and Christians were ignorant of the economic riches of Christianity and were unaware of the reality of the church prosperity. It was the commencement of Pentecostal ministries that brought to the fore the reality of prosperity in the church (Folarin, 2013) and it seems to have terminated abject poverty in the lives of many Nigerians to some extent who now engage in church ministry as avenue for economy riches (Dare et al; 2016).

Pentecostal churches have also been positively impacting on Nigerians in education. Many Pentecostal churches have established schools at all levels, thus contributing to the fight against ignorance. The aim of building these universities is to raise a new generation of leaders to bail Nigerians out of illiteracy, ignorance, subjective thinking, and prejudice and to restore the dignity of the entire black race. The awareness of the above criteria and the importance portend to academic advancement in higher educational system began to permeate the Nigerian higher educational system through the faith-based institutions. The institution was the first university in Nigeria to start using publication indexed in Scopus and Thompson Reuters Web of Science and Citations of scholars calculated through Google Scholars Citation Index for academic promotion (Covenant University, 2016). Hence in the last two years, the institution was ranked the best university in West Africa by the Webometrics Ranking of Universities across the globe (Flatimas, 2016).

In terms of spirituality, the presence of many Pentecostal ministries in cities, towns and villages in Nigeria seems to have drastically reduced ills that characterised African religion in the past to the barest minimum. Further to that, the activities of the management of the institution in question has strictly keyed into the criteria being used by Times Higher Education to rank universities in the world with the hope of ensuring that the university is listed among the topmost universities in the world very soon. In the light of the above, it is expected that Nigerians with moral decency and integrity would have increased drastically, but the reverse is the case. This could be regarded as a paradox with causal factors, which this author intends to address.

Manifestation of Moral Decadence in Pentecostal Churches

The alarming rate of moral decadence in Nigeria could be regarded as the cumulative effects of the failure of many social institutions in Nigeria. These institutions include the family, school, churches, etc. in contemporary Nigeria. In the family, parents with sound moral and ethical sanctity are no longer available like in the traditional society. Hence “morally decadent children with little or no regard to societal norms and values are increasing day by day. When these children move homes to educational institutions, they become worse due to the current state of education in the country (Auwal, 2015).

In churches where moral values are expected to be inculcated, many strange practices and teachings are subjects of orchestrated arguments. Eyoboka (2004) asserts that most Pentecostal churches have not come out to strongly condemn immorality. Instead, they provide comfort zones for moral decadence in all ramifications (Eyobola, 2004). The church has greatly contributed to the high rate of indecent dressing in Nigeria by allowing their members, especially ladies to dress half nude, making it look as if indecent dressing is the normal way of worshipping God in such ministries.

Furthermore, selfishness now supersedes the love of others in Pentecostal churches (Global News, 2016). For example,

the business activities of founders of Pentecostal ministries are not different from that of bourgeois as many workers in institutions established by them cannot adequately take care of themselves and their families due to poor remunerations. The workers are not allowed to personally develop themselves. Such institutions are only interested in the input of workers and spitefully ignore what the institutions need to do to advance workers' course. Not surprisingly, several cases of fraud and corruption are now synonymous with Pentecostal ministries (Global News, 2016). It is on this note that Anipupo (2015) traces the origin and escalation of corruption in the society to the church. According to him, the value system of a given culture influences people's faith and religion, thus the people have imbibed the wrong and corrupt messages that most Pentecostal pastors preach, and they are largely associated with the escalation of corruption in the society (Anipupo, 2015).

Factors Responsible for the Escalation of Moral Decadence in spite of the Proliferation of Churches'

Increase in the number of churches and corresponding rise in moral decay is a very curious paradox in Nigeria. Ordinarily, it would have been expected that a rise in the number of churches would also facilitate a commensurable rise in holy living and life that is fully dedicated to God, but the reverse is the case in Nigeria. This could probably be attributed to the following factors:

Previous studies have associated economic issues with high level of crime in the society (Maddah, 2013). One of such issues is unemployment (Kilishi, Mobolaji, Usman, Yakubu and Yarau, 2014) and it correlates moral decadence in modern society. Several authors have linked the high level of unemployment in the country with evils of all sorts- e.g., fornication, mostly among young girls who lack parental support, material support, employment opportunities, etc. Preaching may not produce any meaningful effect in the lives of such persons. It must be complemented with means of survival. Where such is lacking, obedience to Christian faith may likely be very remote among brethren. Studies have associated the high level

of local and international prostitution to unemployment (Aloto and Ndifor, 2014). Certainly "no woman has ever chosen to be a prostitute where she has had an alternative to prostitution" (Kilishi, *et al*, 2014). Among the unemployed young men, social ills such as stealing, smuggling, armed robbery are evident in literature (Abanyam, Bauchi and Tormusa; 2013).

In contemporary Nigeria, moral integrity seems to have been replaced with laxity. The moral integrity in the recent past has been replaced with conditional principles and it makes many Christians to be different with a message that tilts to prosperity. Messages of many Pentecostal churches in contemporary Nigeria hinge on prosperity, healing, deliverance etc. Although prosperity is necessary to live a successful life, but when it is being preached at the detriment of holiness, it becomes an issue of concern. If much emphasis is placed on prosperity, deliverance, signs and wonders, most Christians could simply forget about holiness and its importance in Christianity. This could be used to explain why some brethren do everything possible to get money. Since it has been realized that priesthood attracts money, people do everything to become pastors and get power to perform wonders and signs. A pastor who sees visions and predicts future events always enjoys the patronage of many Nigerians, often, activities of such pastors are enmeshed in immorality and fake doctrines. For instance, Kilishi *et al* (2014) revealed a pastor who claimed to be obeying prophetic/spiritual injunction to do the will of God, which is to impregnate anyone chosen and revealed by the Holy Spirit, irrespective of whether the woman is married or not. When the woman delivers the baby, the child remains in the ministry with the mother for life. Activities of such pastors undermine the word of God, and members of such churches are not expected to behave differently. Most Pentecostal churches today believe so much in attendance and this seems to be preventing them from rebuking immorality; and most Nigerians prefer churches that provide "comfort zone" for immorality. Probably, this could be used to explain why the spiritual heads of many Pentecostal ministries

used to condone moral decadence of the elite class.

Socio-economic Implications of Proliferation of Churches without Moral Decadence

Economic Implications

The proliferation of churches and moral decadence could have economic effects. Although church growth has been identified as correlate of national development in Western societies, Gehman (1989) cited in Blum and Dudley (2001), but it has been argued otherwise in Nigeria. Mfumbuse (2010) wondered if church growth and the rise in corruption are coterminous. The more churches are spreading the higher Nigeria is being rated as one of the most corrupt nations (Ejike, 2014) This has a negative impact on the economic development of the country in the sense that business transactions that contribute significantly to the economic development depends on trust and moral integrity. Where trust and integrity are lacking, the rate of investment could be very low. The high rate of criminal activities has become a disincentive to business investment as it could prevent foreign investors from investing in Nigeria, and this has a great setback on industrialization and employment (Eelke, 2008). This corroborates Weber (1930) who believes that corruption impedes national development. In a situation where there are 40 criminals for every 100 Nigerians, it could be very difficult to experience national development (Ighomereho and Akpor-Robarro, 2013).

Sociological Implication

Religion is a social phenomenon that ought to affect people's lives positively. In the light of the recent development in contemporary Nigeria however, it has also affected many people negatively. Apart from the problems emanating from bizarre religious rivalry/conflict (Padem, 2015), the proliferation of churches without moral decency seems to have contributed to the escalation of diverse social ills in the country. These include:

- Family problems relating to fornication, separation, "baby mama" teenage mothers and prostitution (Aluko, 2016).
- Organizational issues bordering on sexual harassment, enslavement of workers, denial

of entitlements, corruption of different kinds, injustice, child abuse (Parkinson, 2013), etc.

- Leadership scrimmage/tussle, (Adegoke, 2010) kidnapping (Uzochukwu, 2016), greed, fighting, witch hunting (Eket, 2007), hatred, discrimination, etc.
- The societal perception of good as evil and evil as good, visa-vis.

When Christian behaviours fall short morality and expectation, as often expected in business transaction, marriage, etc, people's hearts are wounded. Such people usually say, "if a Christian sister or brother could do this to me, then it is not worth being a Christian." In other words, the activities of such brethren have prevented other persons from obtaining salvation. When the above social problems are usually high in a given society irrespective of the number of churches, it is an indication that many people in that society lack the fear of the Lord, which would have prompted them to embrace moral integrity.

Conclusion

It is generally assumed that the proliferation of churches, mostly Pentecostal church ministries, ought to have produced attitudinal change in the lives of many Christians. Also, based on the observed escalation of churches in Nigeria, it is expected that attitudinal change of Christians would have been able to influence "ungodly" people who perpetuate evil to the Christian faith and equally result in the socio-economic and political development of Nigeria, but the reverse is the case. The situation of Christian religion in contemporary Nigeria therefore goes to show that church attendance does not ensure moral integrity. People go to church but still find it difficult to embrace holiness as a life. This point to the fact that not every godly environment in contemporary Nigeria rated the nature of God. Thus, being related as the most religious nation in the world (Temitope, 2015) may not have a meaningful impact in moral integrity of many Nigerian Christians until positive changes in their behaviour or attitudes begin to manifest.

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