Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS), Vol.5 No.2 June, 2022; p.g. 261– 273; ISSN: 2695-2319 (Print); ISSN: 2695-2327 (Online)

PROLIFERATION OF CHURCHES IN NIGERIA AND ITS IMPACT ON NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

ASUKWO EDET OKO (PhD)
Lecturer, Department of Religious and Cultural Studies
Akwa Ibom State University
asukwooko@aksu.edu.ng +2348037297842

&

ANIEFIOK EFFIONG UMANAH
Department of Christian Religious Studies
Akwa Ibom State College of Science and Technology
aniumanah2019@gmail.com +2348063160055

Abstract

The world is witnessing an upsurge of proliferation of Churches in recent times. Proliferation of churches describes the multiplicity of Christian denominations. It is a feature most notable in Nigerian Christianity. What teases the imagination of Nigerians is the fact that in spite of the presence of these Christian churches and ministries, Nigeria is notoriously noted for corruption. It is this bewildering situation that elicited the researchers to critically investigate the phenomenon behind proliferation of Churches in Nigeria and beyond. The purpose of this research is to examine the remote causes of proliferation of Churches evaluate the effects of proliferation on National Development. Identify the social and economic relevance, and verify the possible solution to proliferation of Churches. The researcher adopted the historical and descriptive survey approach. From the study it was observed that proliferation of Churches could contribute to advancement of education, health care, employment, morality and other positive contributions to National Development. However, the negative effects of proliferation of churches have, over the time, outweighed the positive effects. Therefore, the researcher advised church leaders and General Overseers to take the lead in bringing together Christians of different denominations to dialogue and better exposure to those Christian virtues that enhance National Unity and Development.

Keywords: Proliferation, Churches, National Development, Impact and Implications.

Introduction

Our global society today is undergoing significant constant expansion of churches which have brought not only changing values, but also greater source of solutions to people's problems. Christianity in Nigeria has witnessed an unprecedented growth in terms of expansion of churches alongside with the phenomenon of evangelical commercialization. According to Gbenda (2006: 117), "there is an upsurge of independent churches often tagged "New Religious Movement or Spiritual Churches" in the country. Their rise and growth are at geometrical progression."

This rapid multiplication of churches is borne out of the understanding that in Nigeria, there is freedom of religious worship. The pace at which churches are spreading like a wildfire is very alarming. Essien, (2003: 30), observes that, the country (Nigeria) is presently a procreate ground for all kinds of religious movements and that a general survey of the history of religions shows that most religions of the world have been in the process of expansion. According to Adesanya, (2004: 55), the unbridled proliferation of churches in Nigeria has steered up concerns among adherents of religious faiths, onlookers and academics alike, that the origin of this phenomenon could be traced to the sparked of religious revolution in 16th century Europe. In recent times, it is observed that expansion of churches has attracted a wide coverage in academic circles. For instance, Nussbaum, (1989: 2), avows that, special international research and documentation centers have been created for the study of religious expansion at Lima, Peru by Kenneth Scott, at Durban, South Africa by G. C. Oosthuizen, at Birmingham, England, by Harold. These research centers understudy the immediate causes and effects of church expansion. It is on this note that Beckford and Mbaeyi (1991: 53), observes that the global interest in the study of new religious movements is partly based on the fact that it is well known among scholars of religions, Sociologist and anthropologists that period of rapid social change, whether positive or negative have been marked in many societies by the rise of these religious movements.

It is the fact that religion in its advent, came in denominational garbs. The European missionaries who brought the faith to us came, not as a single front, but distinct credal denominations, one contrasting itself to the others as the true, the better and the worthy of affiliation by the expected converts. According to Iroegbu (1995: 1) the adventurous background of the three "Cs" Colonialization, Commercialization and Christianization, were the motivated factors of European invasion of Africa. Africa becomes a battle field for victor, and that he who gets the greatest, the highest and the best was significantly understood as conquest. Having arrived, these sects spread in a dual progression. There was an increase in geometrical progression in their splitting and sub-splitting that made them spread all over the place, with new structures, new names and new responsibilities. Definitely, their spread was natural and conversional as well as an increase in population of members. The expansion of churches in Nigeria today is as a result of numerical strength of churches which was a result of church growth. This rapid multiplication of churches according to Ibiyinka (2011: 2) is borne out of the understanding that there is freedom of religious worship in Nigeria. The society is witnessing expansion of churches which has brought changes in values, created job employment, Western education by establishing both primary and tertiary institutions as well as hospitals. In the spiritual wellbeing of man, the new churches have done tremendously as a great source of solution to people's problems.

However, the negative effects brought about by the expansion of churches are over riding 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 churches nowadays fails to stop or reduce moral decadence in the society which ought to be the major impact of churches in our society. Since then the churches have continued to multiply in Nigeria particularly after the Nigerian civil war. The end of the Nigerian civil war 1970 marked a turning point in the history of churches in Nigeria. Tremendous developments could be said to have taken place in the church especially in the areas of its operation and Africanization practice. It is on this note that Essien (2021) observes that the emergence of new churches have

affected the people's way of life both positively and negatively. Their spread is in geometrical progression with new structures, new names, positions and responsibilities.

However, God is interested in church growth and the piety of every members of the church. The 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 in order to ensure societal development. Hence the phenomenon of church expansion in our contemporary society has tremendous effects on the people. It is based on this background that the researcher intense to investigate the effects of expansion of churches in Nigeria and its implication on National Development. This paper explores concept of proliferation of churches, factors and effects of proliferation and recommend among others that church leaders should initiate Christ and their focus is to win souls and not to make money out of the gospel.

Concept of Proliferation of Churches

The church was born out of necessity for the spread of the gospel message. The Apostolic zeal is still present with the Church today, and for this reason, the church has not stopped this missionary work of evangelization. But it is also worrisome to find out that the church has multiplied into too many sects and denominations. Sopuru (2009) has this say concerning the proliferation of churches.

> When you look into the matter of proliferation of churches, you will find out that it confirms what the Bible says that in the last days many people would say "there is where the Lord is" and many people would come in the name of the Lord and would preach a lot of things and would follow them. Also many people would have itching ears to hear what suit them. And the Bible says, it is in the last days that these things would happen. And of course, this is the last days, that is why you hear churches of different names and different doctrines (p. 2-3).

For him some people think proliferation of churches is revival but is not actually true. Onibere (2008) has different view on this too. For him there is nothing wrong with proliferation of churches because the fact remains that if churches do not proliferate, something else will proliferate. According to Onibere (2008), evil will proliferate if the church does not. He believes that some churches are ocultic while some are camouflaged shrines and sees proliferation of churches as a good development especially in Africa because evil would have been more if not for churches. He claims that social and moral decadence would have been worse than what we have now and supports the springing up of churches, because for him if they do not evil will multiply.

Factors Responsible for the Proliferation of Churches

There are so many factors responsible for the proliferation of churches in Nigeria. Some of these factors are as follows:

Religious Factor: This is one of the factors responsible for the proliferation of churches in Nigeria. It is an undisputable fact that Africans are deeply religious, spiritual and superstitious. It is on this note that Adamo (1985: 35), observes that the richest and the most

important heritage of Africa is religion. This heritage permeates the entire life of the African people. The heritage had dominated the thinking of African people to the extent that it shapes their cultural, social, political and economic activities. It has also shaped all aspects of African life to the extent that it becomes so difficult to separate what is religion from what can be considered secular.

To the Africans, religion is a source of real life. Ogunkunle (2006: 297), opines that the practice of religion is the fact that it gives people a feeling of security by a divine power that watches over them and protects them from every form of evils. Similarly, Udofia (2006:13), observes that African is twenty-four hours a day in grip of fear, he fears the world which he lives, he fear his fellow human being, he fear the threat of natural and supernatural forces, he fears the land in which he lives; the spirit etc. Therefore, the essential point of this belief is that being a devotee to the new found faith in Christ Jesus will bring succor to their wellbeing in the family circle.

Political Factor: There is no doubt that the development of political struggle against colonialism and various forms of white minority role in Africa did contribute to a certain extent, to the rise of the numerous independent movements. For instance in South Africa, according to Buhman (1985: 17), in 1957 a clause in one of the apartheid bills gave the minister power to exclude Africans from any church in a "white area". Because of this segregation in worship, Cone (1994: 19), was right when he asked: "Can the Church of Jesus Christ be politically, socially and economically identified with the structures of oppression and also be a servant of Christ? Can the church of Jesus Christ fail to make the liberation of the poor the centre of its message and work, and still remain faithful to the Lord? These rejected Africans were to accept the realities facing them by making out of them what seemed possible. The need to satisfy their religious and political aspirations gave rise to the emergence of a multiplicity of church movements.

According to Dauda and Gbule (2000: 98), African churches emerged due to competition over positions of authority in the church. The mission churches failed to co-opt the African Christians into church government. Missions were divided into European management and African labour. It became the rule that no European missionary should be placed under African authority. An English missionary supported this missionary policy when in 1927 he said to the people, "God wants you all to be Christians, some few of you to be priest; but chooses only white men as bishops". These external and internal influences have caused the people of God here in Africa to be more divided and fragmented.

More so, Iroegbu (1995: 8), opines that there is an external and internal influence on the division and continued proliferation of churches in African countries. Europe and America sponsor these splits consciously in order to keep us more divided and fragmented and consequently be inept to present a united front, unable to speak with one voice and deprived of a common religio-socio and political solidarity. He maintained that, internally there is the equal manipulation of the numerous groups in political and ideological machinery. The religious leaders vying for political recognition by state authority utilize their hold on their adherents as voting and negotiating bullets to shoot at and obtain their wants and needs. On the whole, political factor has helped in the multiplicity of churches we are witnessing of recent time.

Economic Factor: One of the areas where people often criticize expansion of churches is their attitude to materialism. People see opening of churches as a means of making not just profit but also an avenue of getting rich quickly. Udofia (2006: 13), asserts that this situation is achieved by the wide range of deceits and falsehood perpetuated by the self-acclaimed pastors, prophets, presidents and founders of these new churches. These deceptions are carefully and beautifully sold to unsuspecting religious fanatics through popular religious slogans such as "bless you" "A big Amen, a long drawn out praise the Lord, Amen and God bless you". Still on the economic factor, Iroegbu (1994; 7), observes that the Nigerian poor socio-economic condition is a direct co-determinant of the rush to these churches, healing centres and prayer houses in search of wellbeing. Patronizers of these churches go not for divine worship or praise, but to seek and obtain material social welfare, health, jobs, money, security and assurances. Disu (1998: 67), expressed this view when he said that what had given credence to the upsurge of proliferation of churches is nothing more than the socio-economic insecurities which have crept into the lives of Nigerians. He maintains that various kinds of frustration and tensions are decisive factors, which have driven people to all these sects to seek compensation for what they have lost in their socio-economic lives. Our country, Nigeria is witnessing a high rate of unemployment inflation, poor living conditions and frustrations of different kinds. Criminality such as armed robbery, kidnapping, banditry and terrorism are of increase. Then the result of these happenings are broken business, broken relationships, broken homes, and all in need of restoration. Against this background and a positive response, various sects and prophets announced God's visitation. According to Umoh (2013: 661) prosperity gospel has put God back at the center of human experiences by positing God as more than capable of meeting all the needs of desperate Nigerians. It is based on this fact Hagin in Oko (2018) asserts that prosperity church leader often claim a specific blessing can be exchange for the money being donated to their ministry; some instruct worshippers to hold their donations above their heads during prayers. This is because when they raised their donations above their heads, heaven will quickly recognize the giver and there will be financially breakthrough. Therefore, judging from the premise, religion appear to be the most lucrative business today, giving birth to innumerable sects and one can quickly be tempted to agree that if you want to be rich found a church. On contrary, material benefits as a reward for well-fulfilled Christian life is far away from the teaching of Jesus Christ. However, these causes of church expansion will be checked when morality is being observed by individual Christian as well as the church, the body of believers that embrace the faith planted by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Social Factor: One of the reasons for the rise of the African Independent Churches in Nigeria was the crave for leadership and popularity. Nwokereke (2006: 126) opines that man is essentially a social being, who is by nature complete, independent and distinct from one another, but with his limited abilities cannot fully develop and actualize his potentials without the fellowship or interaction of his fellow man either in the church or any social gathering. Man needs a strong desire for participation in the life, structure and system including the power structure. People want recognition, valuation and status, and the cheapest way for man to be recognized is to establish a church in order to have disciples, and more so to boast their own ego. Commenting on the ecclesial recognition and consciousness among church founders, Ukpong (2008:130) observes that there is personal identification with the church. "My church" slogan is become popular among Nigerians. Expression such as … "There is a function in my church," "Come and worship with me in my church", "my church does not

discriminate", 'there is fasting in my church today." "Our church is growing because Jesus is the Lord in our church", "My church is having her annual harvest and I must be there," etc. The ecclesial identification is now influencing very many people to establish church for cheap recognition, but not spirituality. The researchers observe that social aspect of worship made so many people to embrace the newly found faith because according to them, the old churches have stereotyped, dry, at times intellectualistic liturgy while the new churches attracts converts via a more practical, down to earth and participated form of worship. These include the active use of one's body in singing, dancing music that touches the inner longings of a repenting soul.

Psychological Factor: One of the psychological factors in African society is fear. Fear is a phenomenon that pushes people into different churches for solution. People go to prayer houses in search of security and freedom from sinister forces that threaten life. This goes to confirm the observation of Ndiokwere (1994: 36), that as long as one is not in the position to control certain spiritual forces one describes as diabolical one is bound to feel insecure. Secondly, by hostile forces, seen and unseen, menacing him and often his entire household, the African will cross rivers and mountains in search of answer to his problems. However, since miracle has now become the most cherished product which can easily attract people to run around the so-called wonder workers in the Christian folk, many of these miracle preachers parade themselves as having the same power of Jesus that in their worship centres their members almost worship them along with God. For instance, African being naturally religious believe that God can and really does reveal things to man. Research and science do not always provide all the answers, but according to them prophecy plays a major role. Essien (2021), avows that if someone can keep himself holy and keep all the precepts of God, God can definitely reveal secret things to him. This explains why people approach a man of God for God's revelation through prophecy and visions.

Challenges to mental health in Africa is an important psychological factor that make people rush to the prayer houses coupled with the fact that Africans are poor and healthcare expenses are high, making healthcare inaccessible for mentally challenged people.

Effect of Proliferation of Churches

Positive Impacts of Proliferation of Churches

Financial Support and True Brotherhood: Christian churches are doing well in alleviating the poor conditions of their members by showing greater concern and providing them some economic survival. According to Donatus, (2006: 36) members of these groups never feel lost in the crowd, there is always greatest concern for one another. Once an individual is not seen for some time in the gathering, they take it as a point of duty to look for the person, find out what is wrong and provide for his or her needs. It is on this note that the researcher observes that financial support and true brotherly love is very minimal in some mainline churches because some members who are sick and lack what to eat, the church which he or she is a member does not care about, but instead imposes some levies on their members. Sometimes, if a member dies they have to impose some levy before they can bury their corpses. According to Ukpong (2008: 184), the new churches create a atmosphere in which individuals help each other, finding them jobs and visiting them when they are sick. This is a fundamental reawakening of the communal life of the early Christians which is in harmony with the African sense of communalism and togetherness.

Proper Self-examination: Proliferation of churches has made the authorities of the mainline churches to sit up properly and re-examine their mode of operation. Thus, the authorities are challenged to welcome new ideas, information and avoid stereotypes. According to Nmah (2008: 43), one of the positive effects of the proliferation of religion in the society is that, it has made the mother churches to wake up from their spiritual slumber. Every church is struggling to avoid reliving some challenges and difficulties that faced them in the past which may have resulted in the secession of sizeable members of the congregation. Ukpong (2008: 170) affirms this on the proper study of the Holy Bible, "Pentecostalism has reawakened a general desire and love for the Bible as the written word of God and a perennial document of authentic Christian life. Many Christians nowadays take the Bible seriously and it is no longer considered as a book meant for the clergy alone." Therefore, the awakened interest in the Bible is helping people to realize the importance of studying the word of God as commanded in II Tim.2:15. The Bible remains an authoritative word of God.

Expansion of the Christian Gospel: This is another positive effect of proliferation of churches in Nigeria in general. According to Okafor (2008: 98), church proliferation has led to the rapid competition of different doctrine and expansion of Christianity to every nook and cranny in Nigeria. That is, it has lessened the tedious task of evangelizing in Nigeria by only the frontlines churches. Sometimes crusades and church retreats are conducted in the villages which predisposes the villages to having direct access to the gospel. Based on this backdrop, Salami (2001: 30), commented that the missionaries succeeded in converting millions of West African people to Christianity. These people were either traditional worshippers or Muslims before their conversion. As a result of the conversion, the Africans were made to forsake some of their obnoxious customs such as human sacrifices as well as the killing of twins. Mary Slessor was to be specially remembered in this regard. This is particularly important considering that, one of the factors that inhibited the spread of the gospel in Nigeria during the missionary era was lack of indigenous personnel, and since the initiative of the new religious movements often come from Nigerians themselves, it has helped in taking the gospel to even the remotest part of the country.

Therefore, proliferation of churches has contributed tremendously to the spread of the gospel of Christ. This is in consonance with the Holy Scriptures as stated in Acts 1:8. "But you shall receive powers when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth".

Introduction of Western Education and Employment Opportunities: Historically, colonial government did not take the initiative to provide education for the non-literate Africans. According to Obiora (1999: 100), it was recognized that if people learned to read, write and compute, they would be less willing to remain under foreign colonial control. Plantation owners were generally not interested in education because they feared that educated workers would not remain on the plantation with low cash wages. Moreso, business firms generally were not interested in education of Africans, thinking primarily of how increased taxes and demands for better working conditions would affect immediate business profit. Also, the fact that the colonial government was not financially buoyant to sponsor missionaries as well as establishing schools, it remained for the Christian churches to bring education to the Africans. According to Dauda and Gbule (2000: 70), the various Christian missions established schools where mission stations were opened. The CMS established Grammar School in 1908 and the

Dennis Memorial Grammar School in 1878. The Roman Catholic Mission founded St. Gregory College Lagos, in 1868, while the Baptist Academy was founded in Lagos in 1883. Therefore, the activities of the missionaries led to the provision and growth of both Christian and secular education. At present hundreds of seminaries, theological colleges and universities have been established and train Nigerians to become literates as well as generating employment opportunities to the jobless Nigerians.

Some of the schools established by churches includes, Bowen University (owned and operated by the Nigerian Baptist); Covenant University (owned by Living Faith Church); Landmark University (established by Living Faith Church); Benson Idahosa University (owned by Church of God Mission); Redeemers University, (owned by the Redeemed Christian Church of God); Rhema University (owned by Living Christ Mission); Joseph Ayo Babalola University (owned by Christ Apostolic Church); Mountain Top University (founded by Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries); Anchor University (owned by the Deeper Life Christian Ministry), Wesley University of Nigeria (WUNO) owned by Methodist Church, Nigeria and Obong University (established by the Church of Christ) amongst others.

With regard to healthcare services, some of these churches have also established hospitals and other care delivery services to all segments of the society. Through these medium, the churches are contributing not only to the spiritual life of the citizens, but also to human capital development and the development of the society in general. Hence, the Christian missions past and present regards education as an instrument of conversion and nurture par excellence. The aim of building these institutions is to raise a new generation of leaders to bail Nigerians out of illiteracy, ignorance, subjective thinking and prejudice and also to restore the dignity of the entire black race.

Negative Impact of Proliferation of Churches

Religious Confusion: One major effect of the proliferation of churches is the religious confusion it has caused among the people. These churches come with different doctrines and moral disparity that one does not know which one to follow. Everyone claim to be the true church. The Bible has been subjected to individual interpretation most of which and quoted out of context to suit the whims and caprices of the individual churches. Most unfortunate, these founders of churches do not have good theological training, as such mislead their followers.

Nwabor (1985: 10), observes that there are a number of churches today which honour their founders as incarnation of God, for instance, Nigerians witnessed in the 80s the deeds and tragic end of Jesus of Oyingbo. According to him when Jesus of Oyingbo died in 1984 his church was scattered and the kingdom became desolated. It can generally be assumed that many confusion of our times in Christianity stem from the fact that people have different teachings and doctrines. The individualistic interpretation of the Bible has led to many erroneous teaching that the non-Christians do not know which one to join.

Noise Pollution: One of the related problems associated with church proliferation is noise pollution. According to Field (1993: 15), noise pollution has been described as "an unwanted excessive harmonious sound that has undesired physiological and institutional effects on individuals". People living side by side with the church constantly experience noise pollution

emanating from blaring loud speakers might suffer from hearing impairment. Experts in medical science contend that chronic exposure to noise may cause noise induced hearing loss. It could also lead to stress induced ailments like hypertension, diabetes and psychiatric problems. Ekanem (2021) observes that apart from hearing impairment, the other effect one's general health are anxiety, stress reaction and in some extreme situation fright. Noise according to him; disturb sleep and when sleep is disturbed, it affects mental functioning and judgment.

Most often members of these new religious groups tend to practice their religion without considering its impacts on the immediate environment. They often embark on noisy religious activities with the loudest public address systems even when the church is in one room apartment. More worrisome is their night vigils which some of them hold almost every day as if God hear prayers only at nights. In some areas in the society where there are many of such churches, the experience of the people within the neighbourhood can only be imagined and any attempt to persuade the pastors to consider the feelings of the people is often interpreted as devil's intervention that must be matched with fiercer and noiser prayers to combat the enemy. Hence, if the church is located among residential buildings, such events might disturb the peace of the whole neighbourhood, and students living in such environment will lose concentration while reading at night.

Flamboyant Lifestyle: The flamboyant lifestyle among pastors and general overseers in new churches is very alarming. Their individualistic lifestyle depicts a leadership style devoid of commitment and care of the destitute. Ukpong (2008: 182), observes that the flamboyant lifestyle of the Pentecostal Churches tends to suggest that they promote the worships of wealth rather them serving God. These pastors tend to live a lavish lifestyle while most of their congregants are poor. Wearing special clothing and displaying special behaviour becomes their lifestyle. Achunike (2002: 18 - 24), gives an insight into the flamboyant lifestyle of most Pentecostal pastors. He reported that their lifestyle has grossly affected many pastors. He goes on to reveal that some priest healers believe that flamboyant lifestyle plays a position role in converting and retaining the elite class. He argues that some pastors in mainline churches are imitating the flamboyant Pentecostal ministries who are using flashy cars and have well-decorated houses and functions in well decorated offices so that the rich people could respect and believe what they are demanding. He maintained that there is no justifiable reason for anyone to plunge himself into business of clerical flamboyant. More so, a good numbers of pastors from these new Churches have multiple cars at the expense of their poor members through the means of Priestcraft who do not even own a bicycle. They do not believe in the principle of simple or moderate lifestyle. Rather, they rejoice in living flamboyant lifestyle without feeling the pains their members are passing through to meet all their financial demands.

It is in this light of flamboyant lifestyle of pastors that many observes in Ibiono Ibom that proliferation of Churches is a commercial venture. According to Offiong (2003: 199) the fact that the flamboyant lifestyle of Pentecostal ministers lead to much emphasizes on prosperity to the neglect of repentance and salvation messages. Oko (2018) affirms this when he said that prosperity preaching is a poor imitation of the gospel because it leaves no room for brokenness, suffering, humility or delay and it does create illegal shortcut. Prosperity preachers promise instant result and overnight blessing or success if you don't get your

breakthrough it is because you don't give enough money in the offering. He maintained that Jesus calls us to deny ourselves and follow Him while prosperity preaching calls us to deny Jesus and follow our materialistic lusts. It should, therefore not be practiced or encouraged by ministers of both Pentecostals and non-Pentecostal churches, since the practice tends to anchor on materialism as the object of worship and not God.

Moral Laxity: Proliferation of Churches has caused some moral decadence in our society and church in particular. The behaviour of our pastors and general overseers are worrisome. Some of them commit adultery with their members without feeling of guilt. This is because no one can ex-communicate them based on the fact that they are the owner of the Church. In the days where churches were few, Church ministers' maintained discipline, any members who misbehaved were disciplined. But today the reverse is the case whereby new churches are beckoning on them to come and sometime give them responsibility and position. It is based on this Onwuegbu (2004: 9) observes that morality losing its grip on churches today as compared to the time of old. Some of them who claim to have gift of healing go extra miles to invoke the power of demons to heal. Ukpong (2008: 181) observes that the practice of healing, deliverance, vision, dream, and prophecy are subtly entering into the "Official Christianity" in the country. This situation is compounded by the explosion of the Marian visions across the globe, which is becoming very interesting for African Christians coming from the background where dreams and visions of the angelic host is very natural. According to him, the emphasis given to this phenomenon in contemporary African Christianity can easily lead to a conclusion that there is an emergence of neo-paganism in the country.

According to Umoh (2013: 664), a certain self-acclaimed Bishop Sunday William had executed hundreds of suspected child witches in Akwa Ibom State at the request of parents. He confessed that parents paid him to kill their kids to avert from their families witchcraft – related misfortunes. Similarly, according to him a pastor was in court for raping a member of his congregation and a father pastor having a carnal knowledge with his biological daughters. *Sunday Sun*, August 25, 2013, Pastor K. Olubenga was charged with defrauding his parishioner of N 214, 000 on the pretext of praying over the money.

In a related development, Umoh (2013: 664) reported inordinate incidents associated with pastors provoked a crack-down on many Pentecostal churches in Cameroon. According to him, Cameroon's President Paul Biya has ordered the closure of nearly 100 Christian churches in key cities, citing criminal practices organized by Pentecostal pastors that threaten the security of the West African nation. Biya is using the military to permanently shut down all Pentecostal church denominations in the nation's capital, Yaounde, and the North West Regional capital, Bamenda, which have the largest Christian populations in Cameroon. More than 50 churches have been closed, with the government targeting nearly 100 in eight other regions. "We will get rid of all the so-called Christian Pentecostal pastors who misuse the name of Jesus Christ to fake miracles and kill citizens in their churches". More so, many members of these new generation churches have lost a sense of decency, decorum and virtue and immodest dressing and immorality are on the increase. Unfortunately, some of these churches have condoned indecent dressing and moral laxity. Many ladies got to church half nude. Men are not exempted from these indecent wears. Some were tight and saggy trousers, etc. Explanation to this is that the Lord looks at the heart and not at the outward appearance. This explains the reason behind the influx of many youths into such churches. Christians are

expected to be holy (1 Pet. 1: 15, 16) and the life of Christians should be Christ-like. From the above incidences and many more that cannot be adequately exhausted, the indiscipline attitude of pastors really calls for sober reflection. Jesus Christ our master was a living example which our pastors should be emulated, but the reverse is the case.

Conclusion

The effects of proliferation of churches in Nigeria seem to have brought more chaos and disadvantages than the expected gains that religion is expected to offer. This is because one of the purposes of religion is to bring succor to mankind, but it is relatively subjective. The recent media and Western world regard African preachers as opportunists because they believe that most of our preachers go into church opening not because of any divine mandate, but because they see Church opening as a business venture. Most of these preachers are not interested in salvaging the ugly situation at hand as good shepherd, but rather, they go on extorting money from the members both from the rich and the poor in buying private jets, flashy cars, building executive lodges etc. However, church proliferation could be a blessing if properly managed and guided.

Recommendations

In order for us to have a better society through the church, the body of Christ, we therefore make the following recommendations:

1. Different churches and denominational church members should see themselves as one in Christ. Since Christ is not divided, they must also not be division among Christians in order to bring progress and unity among Christians.
2. Before any church is established, there must be clearly stated objectives why the church must be founded. The reason the founder wants to establish the church and how would the church be able to contribute to the lives of the worshippers both physically and spiritually and also how would the church to be founded contribute to area or community where the church is sited.
3. Church founders should attend Bible School or Schools of theology or have mentor with sound knowledge of the scripture before they can carry out any preaching as a career. This is because a situation whereby Bible teaching is used to emphasize material wealth as some founders do today can easily abolish the Christian values or interest in the Bible. Therefore ministers of God should receive good training from theological schools for proper interpretation of the bible and better dissemination of the gospel.
4. There is an urgent need among the mainline churches to look at the necessity of readdressing the orthodox liturgy without altering the substance of it. This will make the liturgy to be very relevant to the Nigerian contemporary society. More so, the dullness and orthodoxy of the frontline churches should be reviewed. And this will enhance the usage of the liturgy and equally make it to be vibrant in line with current societal demands of the new generation Christians. Christians in our modern society are tired of the old system of the liturgy in the long established churches. This has been one of the reasons some members used to formulate flimsy excuses and decide to secede under the guise of "God has called me". Therefore, if the mainline churches can adopt this step of revisiting the old liturgy, then the tendency to lose membership will be checked to a great deal.

5. Church leaders, priests, prophets, evangelists and ministers should imitate Christ whom they claim to have called them and whose priority is to save souls and not make money out of the gospel. They should live exemplary lives worthy of emulation. They should shun evil and speak against the moral decadence in the society.

References

Achunike, H. C. (2002). "Televangelism and the survival of churches". *African Pentecostal Journal of Theology, Psychology and Social Work*, 2(1): 18 24.

Adamo, D. T. (1985). *Black –American Heritage,* Waco-Texas. Texian Press.

Adesanya, I. O. (2004). "Proliferation of churches: Bane or Blessing". *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education*, 11(1): 55 - 60.

Beckford, J. A. &Mbaeyi, P. M. (1991). "The Mist of Life: Religion and politics". ORITA: Ibadan. *Journal of Religious Studies*, 5(1): 53.

Buhman, W. (1985). *The emergence of independent African churches and prophetic movements.* South Africa: Kimbangu Press.

Cone, J. (1994). *Prophetic movements in the independent African churches*. London: Oxford University Press.

Dauda, M. &Gbule, J. N. (2000). *An outline of history of Christianity in West Africa*. Zaria: Micsons Press and Publishers.

Disu, J. A. (1998). "Ban on God-Talk in Nigeria" ORITA. *Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies*, 19(2): 67.

Essien, A. M. (2003). "Proliferation of churches: A leeway to commercialization of religion". *The Oracle International Journal of Cultural Religion and Society,* 1(1): 31.

Field, J. M. (1993). "Effects of personal and situational variables upon noise annoyance in residential area" *Journal of Acoustical Society of America*, 93: 2753 – 2763…

Gbenda, J. S. (2006). "*Marketing" God in Nigeria: A critique of Nigerian independent churches,Issues in the practice of religion in Nigeria.* Ilorin: Decency printers and Stationaries Ltd.

Ibiyinka, O. A (2011). Environmental Effects of Church Proliferation: The Redeemed Christian Church of God as a case study. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science,* 1(15).

Iroegbu, P. (1995). The rise and spread of Religious Movements in Nigeria and the socio-economic situation in the Country in *PORTRAIT*, 5(1): 7 – 8.

Nmah, P. E. (2008). *Religion and Society.* Enugu: RABBONI.

Nussbaum, S. (1989). "*New Religious Movements",* Elhart: Mission Focus Publication.

Nwabor, J. C. (1985). "Divided Christianity" *The Torch,* Vol. 3, No. 5.

Obiora, F. K. (1999). "*The divine deceit in Religion",* Enugu: Optimal.

Offiong, E. A. (2003) *A Pentecostalism in Nigeria: Calabar Experience (1970 – 1995),* Calabar: Glad Tidings Press.

Oko, A. E. (2018). The Bible, Prosperity Preaching and its Impact on Sustainable Development/Cheke. *A Multi – Disciplinary Journal of the Faculty of Humanities*, Vol. 16, 3, 203-219.

Okafor, V. E. (2008). The Noticeable Mushrooming of prayer Groups and Churches. *Journal of Religion and Human Relation*, 1(1): 98.

Onwuegbu, J. (2004). *Meditation for Religion.* Abuja: Inestimable Life Publishers.

Salami, M. O. (2001). "*Christian Mission in West Africa*", Ilorin: Adiek Printing Enterprise.

Udofia, S. D. (2006). *Secret cultism and proliferation of Churches: Evangelizers approach.* Enugu: ACCSE, 13.

Ndiokwere, N. I. (1994). *The African Church Today and Tomorrow: Prospects and Challenges*. Onitsha: Effective Key Publishers.

Nwokereke, E. (2006). Spirituality or Materialism: The Dilemma of Contemporary Church in Nigeria. *Issues in the Practice of Religion in Nigeria.* Ilorin: Decency Printers and Stationaries Ltd.

Ogunkunle, C. O. (2006). Commercialization of Religion in Nigeria: The Christian Perspective, *Issues in the Practice of Religion in Nigeria*. Ilorin: Decency Printers and Stationaries.

Udoette, D. (2006). New Religious Movements in Nigeria: Challenges to the Church in the Third Millennium. *The Search*. Fostering Research on Religious, Cultural and Societal Issus, Enugu: Vol. 1, No., Snaap Press.

Ukpong, D. P. (2008). *Nigerian Pentecostalism: Case, Diagnosis and Prescription*. Uyo: Fruities Publications.

Umoh, D. (2013). Prosperity Gospel and the Spirit of Capitalism: The Nigerian Story. *African Journal of Scientific Research*, 12(1).