



Changing Faces of Nigeria Christianity

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ABSTRACT

Research Problem: Christianity in Nigeria has experienced profound transformations in recent decades, reflecting the intersection of religion, culture, and socio-political change across Africa. The rapid rise of charismatic and Pentecostal movements has reshaped traditional Christian expressions, challenging established denominational structures and theological norms. At the same time, the emergence of indigenous churches has fostered autonomy and cultural self-determination. However, despite these developments, there remains a lack of scholarly consensus on how syncretism, social influence, and political engagement have redefined Nigerian Christianity's identity and role in society. The problem, therefore, lies in understanding how this evolving form of Christianity negotiates its spiritual authenticity, cultural rootedness, and social responsibility within both local and global contexts.

Research Purposes: This study aims to analyze the changing dynamics of Christianity in Nigeria, focusing on its growth, cultural integration, and socio-political influence. It seeks to: (1) examine the rise and spread of charismatic and Pentecostal movements and their theological distinctiveness; (2) explore how indigenous expressions of Christianity incorporate African traditional beliefs and worldviews; and (3) assess the broader impact of Nigerian Christianity on education, healthcare, social justice, and political discourse. Ultimately, the research aspires to demonstrate how these shifts illustrate Africa's capacity to reinterpret and localize global religious traditions in ways that affirm its identity and agency.

Research Methods: The research adopts a qualitative, interdisciplinary approach, drawing from historical, sociological, and theological analyses. Primary and secondary data—including sermons, church publications, media materials, and scholarly works—are examined to trace the evolution of Nigerian Christianity. Contextual theology and cultural hermeneutics are employed as analytical frameworks to interpret how faith practices have adapted to local realities. Field-based observations and case studies of selected churches may also be included to provide empirical grounding and highlight diverse expressions of worship, leadership, and community engagement.

Results and Discussion: Findings indicate that charismatic renewal and Pentecostal revivalism have significantly transformed Nigeria's Christian landscape, emphasizing personal empowerment, prosperity theology, and experiential worship. Indigenous churches have localized Christianity by integrating traditional cosmologies, resulting in vibrant, context-sensitive spiritualities that challenge Western theological paradigms. The research also shows that Nigerian churches play an increasingly central role in social welfare, education, and public health, filling governance gaps left by the state. Furthermore, Christianity has become a major force in shaping public discourse, mobilizing communities for political participation and moral reform. However, the movement's rapid expansion also raises questions about materialism, doctrinal fragmentation, and ethical accountability.

Research Implications and Contributions: This study contributes to the broader understanding of African Christianity as a dynamic and contextual phenomenon. It underscores the need to view Nigerian Christianity not merely as a derivative of Western missions but as an autonomous, evolving religious force that reflects African cultural creativity and resilience. The research challenges Eurocentric theological interpretations by highlighting how local agency, socio-political realities, and indigenous spirituality redefine global Christianity. Practically, it provides insights for policymakers, theologians, and faith leaders on how religion can foster social cohesion, moral integrity, and sustainable development.

In doing so, the study positions Nigeria as a crucial epicenter of contemporary Christian thought and transformation in Africa.

Keywords: Nigeria Christianity, Changing Faces, Growth, Development, Trends, Impact.

INTRODUCTION

Christianity in Africa boasts a profound history, deeply intertwined with Ethiopian Judaism. Centuries before Jesus, significant contact between Ethiopian Jews and the wider Jewish world was established, notably documented in *1 Kings 10*. This long-standing relationship and the continued expansion of Jewish communities across Africa likely shaped several pivotal New Testament events. For instance, the infant Jesus sought refuge in Egypt (*Matthew 2:13–14*), highlighting an early connection. Later, Simon of Cyrene (modern-day Libya) was compelled to carry Jesus' cross (*Matthew 27:32*) when Jesus faltered, making an African the first to symbolically "take up the cross" and follow Jesus to Golgotha. Africans were also present at the very birth of Christianity on Pentecost, with Libyans and Egyptians mentioned in *Acts 2*.

Furthermore, Africans played an important role in spreading the gospel to non-Jews. An Ethiopian eunuch, a high-ranking official, was among the earliest converts (*Acts 8*), having travelled to Jerusalem to worship. Evangelists from Cyrene preached to Greeks in Antioch (*Acts 11:19*), with "the Lord's hand" guiding their efforts. The apostle Paul's ordination for ministry likely included African leaders (*Acts 13:1–4*), and Apollos, a prominent evangelist, hailed from Alexandria (*Acts 18:24*). Early church tradition also credits Mark with evangelising Egypt in the 40s AD, becoming the first Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Saint Anthony the Great, the very "father of monasticism," was Egyptian, highlighting Africa's significant early contributions to Christianity. Indeed, numerous African Church Fathers were instrumental in shaping the core tenets of the Christian faith as we know it today. Figures like Athanasius, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Cyprian, and Tertullian stand out. Athanasius, in particular, was a dominant force, leading theological debates during the Trinitarian controversies and playing a key role in the determination of the biblical canon. His home city, Alexandria, was renowned as "the leading academic centre of the ancient world." Both Alexandria and Carthage (in modern-day Tunisia) were crucial in laying the groundwork for the earliest medieval Western universities, underscoring Africa's intellectual legacy.

This research adopts a qualitative, interdisciplinary approach, drawing from historical, sociological, and theological analyses to examine Africa's foundational role in early Christianity. Primary and secondary data—including sermons, church publications, media materials, and scholarly works—are used to trace the evolution of Christian thought across the continent. Through contextual theology and cultural hermeneutics, the study interprets how faith practices and theological frameworks were shaped by African realities and, in turn, influenced the global Christian tradition. Field-based observations and case analyses of historical and contemporary African churches further ground the study in lived experience.

The novelty of this research lies in its reinterpretation of Africa not as a peripheral recipient of Christianity but as a formative cradle of the faith, demonstrating that African actors, ideas, and institutions were integral to the birth, development, and dissemination of Christian theology. This approach challenges Eurocentric historiography and positions Africa as an indispensable foundation of the global Christian narrative—an origin, not merely an extension, of Christian civilization.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Earliest Christian Centres in Africa

Contrary to the common belief that Christianity is a foreign religion, it has been in Africa since its earliest days. Christianity arrived from Asia shortly after the founding of the church in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, A.D. 30 (Hildebrandt 1981:5). While the New Testament doesn't explicitly document missionary work in Africa as it does in Asia and Europe, it nonetheless indicates various contacts with the continent.

The account of Joseph, Mary, and the infant Jesus fleeing to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15) illustrates Africa's easy accessibility from Palestine (Groves 1948, p. 58). It is also to be noted that a man called Simon Cyrene is mentioned in the passion story in the book of Mark 15:21, who was asked to help Jesus carry His cross while He was tired on His way to Golgotha. Cyrene is a region in Northern Africa (Libya). Acts 2:10 revealed to us that on the day of Pentecost, people came from Cyrene. After the persecution of the Church in Jerusalem, it was some citizens from Cyprus and Cyrene (Hellenistic Jews) who carried the Gospel of Christ to the Greek-speaking Jews (Acts 11:20). (Fatokun 2014:19)

The Early Church in Egypt

Christianity in Africa reportedly found its first significant foothold in Alexandria, Egypt (Fatokun 2014:19). Two main theories account for this: either converts from Pentecost brought the Gospel directly, or, as an apostolic tradition suggests, Apostle Thomas might have preached there during a stopover on his voyage to India via the Nile and Red Sea (Fatokun 2014:19).

Coptic Christians assert that Mark the Evangelist brought the Gospel of Jesus Christ to Alexandria in the first century. (Parrinder 1969, 103). Though not all scholars accepted this. There is also a Syrian writing called Clementine Homilies, this writing describes Barnabas, possibly after his break from Paul, as the first to preach the gospel of Christ on the streets of Alexandria. (Farquar 1926). Notwithstanding, the Egyptian Christians widely accept that Mark is their Patriarch, the Eastern Orthodox Patriarchs of Alexandria have always been elected beside a tomb in Egypt, and it is believed to be Mark's. (Fatokun 2014, 20).

Apart from the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-38), the first Christian convert in Africa is believed to have been a person of Greek origin residing primarily in Alexandria. Over time, efforts were made to spread the Gospel among the native Egyptians, known as "Copts" (who were of Hamitic origin). (Hildebrandt 1981, p 7). Efforts were made to translate the Bible into their local language. Interestingly, by the year A.D 300, a Coptic Bible had been in existence, and by the next century, there was already an abundance of Christian literature translated from Greek into Coptic. Stuart (1909) argues that Christianity's indigenisation fuelled its tremendous growth. Within 300 years of its inception, local churches had been established in at least 80 "Church districts," each led by a Bishop, with the Bishop of Alexandria serving as the Patriarch. Alexandria in Egypt became a crucial Christian hub following the 70 C.E. siege of Jerusalem (Stuart 1909). Saint Mark, the disciple and Gospel author, is credited with founding an Alexandrian bishopric around 49 C.E. and is honoured as the individual who brought Christianity to the African continent. Beyond its apostolic ties, Alexandria was significant for its scholarship, notably being the location where the Septuagint—a Greek translation of the Old Testament—was traditionally created at the behest of Ptolemy II for the city's large Jewish populace. The scholarly tradition continued with Origen, head of the School of Alexandria in the early third century, who is recognised for his monumental Hexapla, a compilation comparing six Old Testament translations (Stuart 1909).

The Early North African Church (Tunisia, Libya, Algeria and Morocco)

North Africa, often called Roman Africa due to its Roman influence, emerged as the second major centre of Christianity on the continent. Its capital was Carthage (modern-day Tunisia), and Agrippius served as its first Bishop (Stuart 1909).

No précised date as to when Christianity penetrated this area and where it came from is not really known. Although some scholars suggest that Rome. (Grooves 1948, p. 58). There is a greater possibility that Christianity came into Carthage from the East (Asia), with which it had numerous ties through trade and commerce. (Stuart 1909, p. 15). However, G.E. Igwe relates that those missionaries from Byzantium

established churches and built cathedrals in North Africa. (Igwe 2000, p. 5). As mentioned earlier, even though the actual date of the inception of the church in North Africa is not known with certainty, it's likely to be sometime before A.D. 180, and that was the year the church made her first appearance in the light of history. Grooves (1948:59). On July 17th, A.D 180, twelve Christians—seven men and five women from Scillium in Numidia—were tried, condemned, and executed in Carthage. for refusing to deny their faith. (Grooves 1948:59).

The Church in North Africa experienced remarkable and swift growth. By approximately A.D. 220, before the death of St. Tertullian, it boasted between 70 and 90 bishoprics. This number surged to around 150 by A.D. 250, during St. Cyprian's time. By the early fourth century, just 50 years later, the North African Church had expanded to include no fewer than 250 bishoprics, each led by its bishop (Hildebrandt 1981, p. 10).

The church in North Africa was very powerful and occupied a place of much significance in the earliest period. It is from this church that the three great African Saints (St. Tertullian- the great apologist, polemic and theologian, born in Carthage; St Augustine, born in Thagaste and St. Cyprian, bishop of unity and reconciliation, born in Carthage. These three made significant contributions to the development of the global Church in a number of ways. (Igwe 2000, p. 5) Cyrene (modern-day Libya) played a significant role in the early Church. According to Coptic tradition in Egypt, Saint Mark himself was originally from Cyrene. This tradition further states that upon his return to Cyrene, Mark appointed Lucius of Cyrene as its first Bishop. Tragically, Lucius later suffered martyrdom in Alexandria on April 25, 68 AD, following a popular uprising. Unlike Egypt, where Christianity became indigenous, the church in North Africa was profoundly Latinized. Latin served as the church's official language, meaning services were conducted and most Christian literature was written in Latin (Groves 1984, p. 65).

The Early Church in Abyssinia (Ethiopia)

Abyssinia (modern-day Ethiopia) stands as the third early identified centre of Christianity in Africa. The Christian church was established there in the fourth century by St. Frumentius and Edesius of Tyre (Cross 1958, p. 474). The Ethiopian Church traces its origins to this period.

Years after his initial mission, Frumentius journeyed to St. Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria, where he received Episcopal Consecration in A.D. 350 (Cross 1958, p. 474). Upon his return to Abyssinia, Christianity saw significant expansion. The King of Axum subsequently embraced Christ, leading to Christianity becoming the kingdom's official religion and the construction of a large church (Hildebrandt 1981, p. 21).

The Early Church in Nubia (Sudan)

Nubia became Africa's fourth Christian centre (Parrinder 1969:108) with the establishment of the church in the 6th century, during Emperor Justinian's reign (A.D. 527-565). This occurred through two distinct missions, one led by Presbyter Julian, an Egyptian Monophysite, who founded a Monophysite Church in Nobadae, northern Sudan, around A.D. 543 (Parrinder 1969:108).

The second mission that came to Sudan shortly after Julian was a non-Monophysite one. Due to their doctrinal differences, Julian dissuaded the northern Sudanese from welcoming these missionaries. (Parrinder 1969:108). Because of this, they were forced to move down south, where they settled and worked successfully among the Makorites. With the existence of the two missions, one in the south and the other in the north, Christianity took a strong root and greatly flourished in Sudan, as many churches were reportedly built. Just like Ethiopia, Sudan also remained a Christian kingdom for years.

Growth and Development of the Church in Africa

It's important to note that Christianity reached Africa between roughly 33 and 65 A.D., preceding the writing of the Gospel of Mark (Asamoah 2020). After this initial introduction, European missionaries later reintroduced Christianity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Previously, Portuguese missionaries were active between the 15th and 18th centuries (Denteh 2021). These missionaries had diverse motivations for coming to Africa, including social, economic, and humanitarian reasons. Initially, the Portuguese served as chaplains for local traders, but their attempts to convert the native population saw little success. The few who converted were often only nominal Christians, as they continued their traditional practices and consulted local priests. By 1742, the Portuguese had lost control of the Gold

Coast trade to the Dutch and British, and by the end of the 18th century, evangelism had made little progress in West Africa.

The early 19th century was a turning point for missionary work, thanks to the abolition of the slave trade. This change allowed for more dedicated evangelism in West Africa. The Church Missionary Society (CMS) capitalised on this by sending two missionaries to Sierra Leone in 1804 to work with freed slaves. Their efforts led to the establishment of a local Anglican church in Sierra Leone by 1816, which celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1866 (Asamoah 2023:6).

Sierra Leone became a crucial base for evangelisation across West Africa, including areas that would become Nigeria, Liberia, and The Gambia. The CMS's mission extended beyond spreading the gospel; they also undertook practical initiatives. These included building settlements and schools for emancipated slaves, such as Four Bay College in 1827, providing educational materials, and teaching handicrafts (Asamoah 2023:6).

Christian mission churches began flourishing in Nigeria by 1840, as 18th-century European and American missionary organisations successfully converted Nigerians and established mission stations (Adamolekun 2012:2). This period, marked by renewed religious fervour following the abolition of the slave trade, enabled numerous British and American churches to dispatch missionaries to Nigeria's coastal and interior regions. Although the Anglicans, under the Church Missionary Society (CMS), made the first attempt in 1841 with the failed Niger Expedition (Adamolekun 2012:4), the first successful Christian mission penetration into Nigeria occurred in 1842. This breakthrough happened when freed slaves in Badagry and Abeokuta invited Wesleyan Methodists, leading to the arrival of Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman, William de Craft and his wife from the Gold Coast (Ghana) in Badagry, followed by Henry Townsend's dispatch to Abeokuta a few months later (Adamolekun 2012:4).

In 1850, the American Baptist Mission dispatched Rev. Thomas J. Bowen to establish stations in Ijaiye and Ogbomosho. Conversely, Roman Catholicism entered Nigeria in 1862 via the Society of the African Missions. Despite many succumbing to the climate, these missionaries were well-trained and prepared. They effectively minimised the language barrier by using interpreters and learning local languages (Adamolekun 2012:4).

The Emergence of Independent Churches

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many African Churches emerged across Nigeria, Ghana, and South Africa. In Nigeria, key examples include the Native Baptist Church (1888), the United Native African Church (1891), the African Church (1901), the Christ Army Church (1915), and the United African Methodist Church (Eleja, 1917) (Ayegboyin and Ademola 2013, p. 13). Ghana also saw the founding of churches such as the National Baptist Church (1898), the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, and the Nigritian Fellowship (1907). These early churches reflected a strong desire for African self-expression and independence from missionary control, to varying degrees. (Ayegboyin and Ademola 2013:13).

The First World War brought not only economic hardship but also a devastating influenza epidemic. Mainline churches, in their inability to provide solutions or comfort to those afflicted by the virus, inadvertently led many Yoruba Christians to become disillusioned with the perceived helplessness of mission church leadership (Ayegboyin and Ademola 2013:13). In response to this crisis and their desire for a spiritual solution, these Yoruba Christians began forming prayer and healing fellowships. These groups became the genesis of new congregations, including the Diamond Society, the Faith Tabernacle, and the Cherubim and Seraphim Society, among others, which eventually separated from the established mission churches.

It is to be noted that due to the disaster, which made several of the missionaries return to their country, the sponsors could no longer support the missionaries, which forced the missionaries to be forced to put the doors of many churches under lock. This act made a large number of people disappointed at their faithless act, and this compelled some of the African leaders to start holding prayer meetings at the front of these closed churches.

David Barrett (1971) contends that "independency reflects a rebellion against a Christianity that had become over-Europeanised." Africans yearned for a worship style that resonated with their own cultural identity. Mission churches faced criticism for not allowing local congregants enough freedom of expression, prompting Africans to seek modes of worship that embraced their culture in the adoration

of God. Consequently, in the African Independent Churches (AICs), the liturgy became more Africanized. This involved incorporating elements like singing, drumming, and dancing, which were integral to African cultural expression (Ayegboyin and Ademola 2013, p. 15).

The Africans had a strong desire for a purer form of Christianity, which they perceived that the missionaries were not living up to the expectations of the Bible. Because of this, there was an agitation from the African leaders. In Ghana, for example, the members of The Methodist Society- Akonomnsu (water drinkers), which broke away from the Methodist church at Anomabu in 1862, the main reason for their break from the church was because they felt the church had failed to enforce its rules against buying, selling and drinking of alcoholic beverages. (Ayegboyin and Ademola 2013:15)

In Nigeria, the breakaway churches criticised the clergymen because they appointed well-known secret society men and some men with questionable traits, possibly because of their status in the society, into the church hierarchy. (Ayegboyin and Ademola 2013:15). It was believed that some of the pastors regularly visit herbalists for spiritual power, and most time put on charms in the church.

Mainline churches typically choose leaders based on educational qualifications, effectively excluding the uneducated from leadership roles. In contrast, indigenous churches explicitly demonstrated that less educated or even illiterate individuals could possess genuine leadership gifts. This inclusive approach made local congregants feel more comfortable and at home worshipping within these indigenous churches (Ayegboyin and Ademola 2013, p. 15).

Characteristics of African Indigenous Churches

The indigenous churches have some characteristics that make them distinct from the mainline churches. Some of these AIC wear white garments, while some do not, some carry spiritual rods, while some burn candles. Their distinct characteristics will be discussed briefly.

Emphasis on the Spiritual

Many African Independent Churches (AIC) prefer to be called "Spiritual Churches"—*Ijo Emi* in Yoruba, *Sunsum Sore* in Akan, or *Momo Sulemo* in Ga—because they believe their church is directly guided by the Holy Spirit.

They view all events, particularly misfortunes like barrenness, poverty, or illness, through a spiritual lens. This belief also extends to their worship, where the Holy Spirit is said to be present, leading many to prophesy, heal the sick, or speak in tongues.

Prayer

One of the most common and prominent characteristics of the AIC is its emphasis on prayer. The AIC have a strong belief that prayer is so important in the day-to-day life of a believer and as such they engage more in prayers. It is to be noted that the Yoruba refer to these churches as the Aladura (praying people). The AIC see prayer as the primary spiritual activity to be carried out by the believer, while activities are seen as secondary.

These churches mostly have prayer groups called “prayer warriors”- *afadurajagun* (Yoruba). In these AICs, many of them organise prayer meetings and vigils where they pray for long hours. Quite a number of these churches also have special places where they wrestle in prayer. (Ayegboyin and Ademola 2013, p. 18).

A preference for a more expressive style of worship

A key characteristic of African Independent Churches (AICs) is their freer, more demonstrative mode of worship, which deeply resonates with Africans' preference for expressive religious practices. Unlike the more formal liturgical services of mainline churches, AICs have attracted many Africans by making their worship styles engaging and culturally relevant. (Ayegboyin and Ademola 2013:21).

The songs that are being sung are, most time, customarily indigenous songs in traditional lyrics. Also, one of the fascinating things about the AICs is that the members are carried along in the mode of worship. All the members participate in singing, clapping and dancing. (Ayegboyin and Ademola 2013:21).

Evangelism and Revival

African Independent Churches (AICs) are renowned for their zealous commitment to evangelism and revival. These churches actively organise crusades, revivals, and prayer sessions in strategic locations across towns and villages. Their proactive involvement in evangelism and revivals is, in fact, a key factor behind their rapid growth. Many leaders of African Independent Churches (AIC) were travelling preachers and evangelists who held revival meetings wherever they went. Prominent figures include Moses Orimolade, Joseph Ayo Babalola, and Simon Kimbangu, among many others. Notably, the open-air crusades led by Joseph Ayo Babalola eventually evolved into the Christ Apostolic Church after his passing. (Ayegboyin and Ademola 2013:22).

Emergence of Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism emerged in the 20th century as a significant Christian movement, leading to the establishment of numerous Pentecostal churches worldwide. Its origins recall the biblical account of Pentecost in the book of Acts, where disciples were baptised by the Holy Spirit, spoke in unknown tongues, and witnessed over three thousand conversions in a single day.

Nigeria's early religious renewal was characterised by a surge in evangelistic activities, with its doctrinal emphasis enabling rapid geographical expansion (Ojo 2018, p. 80). The rise of Pentecostalism in Nigeria began with a powerful religious awakening among young members of the Scripture Union in war-torn Biafra. This revival gained national attention in 1968 and soon spread from the University of Ibadan (Ojo 2018, p. 80).

A significant revival began in 1970 when several Christian Union students reported receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit during a private prayer meeting. This Pentecostal experience, shared by three of their leaders, quickly inspired more students to embrace the movement. The revival soon extended to other Christian groups, including the Student Christian Movement (founded 1937) and the Scripture Union (founded 1887). By 1973, the movement's impact was so profound that Christian students at the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) displayed a large banner at the gate boldly proclaiming, "Welcome to Jesus University" (Ojo 2018, p. 80).

Emerging from Nigerian universities in the mid-1970s, leaders of the charismatic revival swiftly founded independent Pentecostal groups, like Lagos's Deeper Christian Ministry (established 1973), to disseminate their Pentecostal experiences and continue their activities (Ojo 1992:135). Initially, the Redeemed Christian Church of God, an Aladura church founded in 1952, was separate from this revival. However, under Enoch Adeboye's leadership, it gradually transformed into a fully Pentecostal church. These new charismatic groups were initially inter- or non-denominational, operating primarily on weekdays, with members retaining their affiliations with existing non-Pentecostal churches. Matthew Ojo (2018:81) notes the authoritarian leadership style of these Pentecostal figures, who often treat their organisations as personal empires. Their followers revere them as "men of God," "the anointed," or "Daddy G.O.," and more recently as "Rev. Dr.," "bishops," and "archbishops," surrounded by extensive protocol, including bodyguards. Through strategic use of social media, these pastors have achieved celebrity status, enabling them to attract massive congregations.

It is to be noted that most mainline denominations that were against the charismatic expression of the gift of the Spirit, by the beginning of the new millennium, were influenced by their student groups like the Baptist Student Fellowship, the Anglican Youth Fellowship, etc, and the church accepted Pentecostalism to a reasonable extent.

Nigerian Pentecostalism can be divided into three main categories. The first is classical Pentecostal churches, which were established by Western missionaries in the 1930s and 1940s and include denominations like the Foursquare Gospel Church and the Assemblies of God. The second group consists of indigenous Pentecostal churches, which were founded by local men and women between the 1920s and 1950s. The third and most prominent category today is the new charismatic churches, which emerged from a university campus revival in the 1970s.

Trends and Impact

Pentecostalism has sparked a renewed passion for the Bible, with many Christians now seeing it as a personal guide rather than a book meant only for the clergy. This emphasis on constant Bible study

has helped Christians understand that prayer is a two-way conversation with God, not a monologue. The Bible is seen as the authoritative word of God, and the primary way He communicates with believers.

Music is a key aspect of this trend; religious music in Nigeria has significantly improved with the rise of Pentecostalism. This has allowed young people from various ethnic and religious backgrounds to unite and enjoy a common religious sound. Many contemporary gospel musicians now incorporate speaking in tongues and chanting into their songs within Pentecostal churches.

According to Hilary Achnike, "Liturgy deals with the way people worship God." One of the prominent practices of the Pentecostal is that they take worship seriously and allow it to penetrate and influence their lives. Indeed, for Pentecostals, worship is a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week experience of God. (Achunke 2004, p 66). Because of the liturgical mode of worship in the Pentecostal churches, it has also influenced the liturgical practice of the mainline churches.

It is worth of note to say that the use of media by religious organisations cannot be overemphasised in publicising and propagation the gospel. Religious institution uses the media to carry out their various religious activities and make known their programmes through the media. It is to be noted that churches use television, radio, newspaper, magazines, handbills, books, posters and a host of other media channels to publicise the church and evangelise to the masses. On the Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) Jos, there is a Christian half-hour where different denominations are allowed to preach the gospel on air. (Ogwo, Asemah & Obidike 2013:61). Similarly, a huge number of religious bodies own broadcasting channels whereby they are able to broadcast their programs, which gives room for a large number of their adherent to benefit from it both far and near. The likes of the Synagogue of All Nations have their television stations called "Emmanuel Television," The Redeemed Christian Church of God, "Dove Television," and a host of others. (Ogwo, Asemah & Obidike 2013:63).

A notable recent trend within global Christianity is the construction of mega-buildings by churches and the establishment of vast transnational networks. Founded in 1952 by Reverend Josiah Akindayomi and currently led by Pastor E.A. Adeboye, the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) is a prime example of a rapidly growing Pentecostal church. With a presence in 198 countries, it's considered one of Africa's fastest-growing churches (The Cable 2021, cited in Adedibu, 2024). Its UK flagship, Jesus House, led by Pastor Agu Irukwu, has over 3,000 members (Adedibu 2024, p. 123).

Similarly, Living Faith Church Worldwide (also known as Winners Chapel), founded by Bishop David Oyedepo, once held the record for the world's largest church auditorium. Commissioned in 1999 in Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria, this auditorium could seat 50,400 attendees (Gbongun 2021, in Adedibu, 2024). Oyedepo has replicated his model of charismatic and faith-based messages globally, with over six thousand branches in Nigeria and a significant presence in major urban centres across Asia, Australia, North America, and Europe (Burgess, Gifford & Ojo 2020, 2015, 2006 in Adedibu 2024).

In 2020, Pastor David Ibiyeomie, founder of Salvation Ministries in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, finished building the "Hand of God Cathedral." With seating for 120,000 people, it is now the largest auditorium in the world. The ministry's global expansion includes the recent purchase of a 51,000-square-foot former Central Baptist Church in Tarrant, Alabama, originally built in 1923 and insured for \$7 million (Nairaland 2021, in Adedibu 2024).

The Church of Pentecost (COP) from Ghana was founded by Irish missionary Pastor James McKeown but is now led by Ghanaian Apostle Eric Nyamekye. The church has a significant presence in Toronto, Canada, with a Twi-speaking branch of over 3,000 members, making it the largest. A smaller branch of 1,000 members includes some non-Ghanaians, and other branches in cities like Ottawa, Montreal, and Hamilton are predominantly Ghanaian (Kalu 2010, p. 43).

Impact

The impact of Christianity in the African continent cannot be overemphasised, since the advent of Christianity in Africa, various impacts have been recorded, which will be discussed briefly.

Educational Initiative

Nigerian churches are actively engaged in civic life, particularly in the educational sector. This involvement is crucial given the federal government's declining investment, falling educational standards, and frequent academic disruptions due to strikes. These strikes, often stemming from inadequate

infrastructure or unpaid lecturer salaries, lead to a significant "brain drain," as educators seek opportunities abroad.

Historically, mission churches pioneered many educational institutions in Nigeria. The primary and secondary schools established by Catholic and Methodist missionaries not only instilled moral and religious values but also provided vital educational opportunities to countless Nigerians, including non-Christians.

Due to the lack of proper funding of this institution, and has not to function effectively, which has allowed the AICs to bridge the gap by establishing various educational institutions from primary to tertiary institutions in Nigeria. (Adedibu 2018; p. 4-5). We have examples of these institutions owned by the church in Nigeria: Ajayi Crowther University, Ibadan, owned by the Anglican Church. Benson Idahosa University, Benin, owned by God of the Church, Bowen University, owned by the Baptist Church, Landmark University, Omu-Aran, owned by Living faith church, Redeemers University, Ede, owned by The Redeemed Christian Church of God, Covenant University, owned by the Living Faith Church, to mention but a few. These institutions have been able to employ thousands of people, also serving as a means of eradicating unemployment in the country.

Awareness and Counselling

Churches in Nigeria have taken on the vital role of organising meetings, programs, and counselling sessions for young people on marriage. These initiatives serve as crucial avenues for upholding a biblical worldview on family life and the institution of marriage.

It's also noteworthy that many Nigerian churches actively address issues of sexuality and sex education, largely in response to the challenges posed by HIV and AIDS (Adedibu 2018; p. 8). For example, the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) has responded to the HIV and AIDS pandemic not only through prayer and compassion but also by providing significant medical assistance to infected Nigerians. One of RCCG's key strategies is the Redeemed AIDS Programme Action Committee (RAPAC). Through the church's influence, their African Missions North America chapter partnered with CitiHope International (CitiHope), leading to a groundbreaking donation of \$1.5 million worth of HIV drugs for distribution to those in need (Adogame 2007; 148).

Human Development

A significant trend among neo-Pentecostal churches in Nigeria is their strong emphasis on member empowerment, which includes organising programs to enhance their human capacity and employability. Daystar Christian Centre, founded by Samuel "Sam" Adeyemi and inaugurated on November 18, 1995, exemplifies this approach. The church advocates for transformational leadership within its ranks to positively influence broader society. It promotes a strong work ethic in business and enterprise, and its founder's teachings cover practical topics such as self-help, discipline, work, relationships, faith, finances, and vision.

Daystar actualises its mission through various programs, including the "Success Power International Ministry of the Church," which produces "Success Television" and radio broadcasts, digital products, and other publications. Pastor Sam Adeyemi's extensive knowledge in empowerment has made him a sought-after speaker for transnational networks of Nigerian churches in the diaspora, further highlighting the impact of African Christianity on human development (Adedibu 2018; p.8).

CONCLUSION

Christianity in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, stands today as a dynamic force that continues to shape the continent's spiritual and social landscape. Evolving from its early missionary roots into a diverse and self-sustaining faith, African Christianity has become a symbol of resilience, creativity, and transformation. It embodies a living dialogue between tradition and modernity, merging deep spiritual fervor with an enduring commitment to social change. Across the continent, churches have emerged as centers of education, healthcare, and humanitarian service, nurturing not only faith but also human development and community empowerment. As it continues to grow and diversify, African Christianity reflects the continent's capacity to redefine faith through its own cultural lenses—vibrant, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of its people. Its enduring strength lies in its ability to remain rooted in communal values while inspiring hope, renewal, and progress across Africa and beyond.

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