

## THE AMBIVALENCE OF THE PROLIFERATION OF CHURCHES IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

This study examined the ambivalence of the proliferation of churches in Nigeria, which is a source of concern to every rational minded person because churches and Christians are increasing but wickedness is abounding. The causes of the proliferation of churches are poverty, unemployment, desire to be independent, get rich quickly syndrome and easy entrance to the priesthood. The positive effects are global evangelism by preaching to every creature and leadership development spiritual awakening, job opportunities, community development, education, welfare, healthcare services, increase of the numerical strength of Christians, commitment and participation while the negative effects are exploitation and manipulation of members, misinterpretation of the scripture, lack of total dependence on God, unhealthy inter- denomination competition among the leaders, noise pollution during services, rivalry, and unethical behavior. This study adopted quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to know their practices, passion for evangelism and to trace the history of proliferation of churches in Nigeria. Primary and secondary sources of data collection, such as interview, observation, articles, bible and text books were used. Despite the spread of churches and increased in the numerical strength of Christians, there is low level of integrity and high level of crime, corruption and moral decadence. This paper recommended that there should be proper theological training before anybody should be allowed to establish his or her church, Christians should know the word of God so that they will not be duped by the fake pastors and government should enforce laws against evil practices in the churches in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Ambivalence, Proliferation, Churches, Christianity and Nigeria

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## Introduction

There are many churches in every Nigerian street, which shows that Nigerians are very religious. These churches whether established with genuine motive to spread the gospel or evil motive to exploit and manipulate members for financial gain, play vital roles in the lives of many Nigerians, (Dim 2024). Fakoya (2023) states that Nigerians have been religious from creation, because man is religious in nature from the beginning, as he was created to be dependent on a supreme being, believed to direct the cause of nature and help him whenever he is in trouble. Religious feelings were expressed in different ways through African traditional religious practices for blessing, protection and solace, before the advent of Christianity in Nigeria. So the religious zeal that Nigerians have sustained Christianity and led to the spread of churches everywhere in the nation, also poverty, materialism, unemployed and desire to be independent contributed greatly.

According to Okobia (2023) church proliferation in Nigeria is a serious concern to many individuals, because there have been increase in Christian denominations especially in the Pentecostal sector. This growth is caused by many factors such as unemployment, search for spiritual solutions to problems and urbanization. The establishment and growth of churches shows the right to freedom of worship and religious expression. Churches promote moral value by teaching the truth and serving as the moral watch dog of the society. They also provide social welfare services such as health care, education, counseling and empowerment. Furthermore, the unchecked or uncontrolled proliferation of churches has breed commercialization of the gospel, unqualified religious leaders false doctrine, manipulation and exploitation of the members. This study seeks to examine the positive and negative impact of proliferation of churches in order to understand its implications for Nigeria.

## The Conceptual Frame Work

**Ambivalence:** Ambivalence is showing negative and positive feelings about something or somebody. Okobia (2023) defines ambivalence as having feeling of love and hate for somebody. It is also having good and bad feeling about something or proliferation of churches in Nigeria.

**Church:** Church is the gathering of believers for worship (Hebrews 10:25). Okobia (2023), defines church as a group of Christians gathered for religious purpose. Njoku (2024) states that the church is the body of Christian believers.

**Proliferation:** Della (2022) defines proliferation as the rapid increase in the number or amount of something. It is to grow or increase rapidly. Proliferation of churches is the spread of churches in every nook and cranny of Nigeria.

## Christianity

Yaro (2024) states that Christianity is a monotheistic religion based on the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christianity is an offshoot of Judaism, the adherents are called

Christians and they believe in the Trinity, three persons in one God. God the father, God the son (Jesus) and God the Holy Ghost. They also believe that Jesus died for the redemption of mankind and man has to give his life to God for him to be saved. Bible is the sacred texts and it is divided into two parts, Old Testament and New Testament.

## **Nigeria**

According to Yaro (2024) Nigeria is a sovereign country found on the western coast of Africa, called the "Giant of Africa ". Nigeria is the most populous country in the continent and sixth most populous in the world. It is bordered by Niger in the. North, Chad and Cameroon in the East, Benin in the West and Atlantic Ocean in the South. Abuja is the capital city, English is the official language and the three major languages are Hausa in the North, Yoruba in the West and Igbo in the East.

## **Literature Review**

Dim (2024) states that many scholars have examined the proliferation of churches from the positive and negative angles. The functionalist scholars stated that the growth of churches is a response to societal needs, provision of comfort, social support, health care, education, moral guidance and societal development. The critical scholars emphasized on the negative aspects of church growth by stating that the growth of churches has led to false doctrine, prosperity gospel and neglect of holiness and spiritual growth. Furthermore, lack of strict regulation has led to the establishment of different churches without proper theological or ministerial training, which contributed to evil practices and lack of public trust in churches and church leaders. Also, the competition among churches has led to different evangelism strategies and inter-denominational conflicts. Despite these challenges, the proliferation of churches is a vital expression of religious revival in Nigeria. According to Yaro (2024) the proliferation of churches started in the 1990s, as a result of prosperity gospel, which made some pastors to be rich and attracted the unemployed youth to establish their churches as means of livelihood. The shift from salvation and holiness preaching to prosperity gospel reduced Christian values and integrity in the society and enhanced moral decadence, crime and corruption.

## **The Statement Of The Problem**

The Statement of the problem is that, despite the establishment of many churches and many Christians in Nigeria, there is high level of crime, corruption, moral decadence and lack of integrity.

## **Methodology**

The researcher is going to use quantitative and qualitative approaches, such as interview with some pastors, church leaders, members of some churches, members of the community and observation

by worshipping with some of the churches to know their practices, their passion for evangelism and their impact on community development. Secondary data collection such as books and articles are used to trace the history of the proliferation of churches in Nigeria.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **The Theories of Proliferation of churches**

The five theories of the proliferation of churches are as follows:

- 1.Church growth theory
- 2.Political economy theory
- 3.Sociological and institutional fracture theory
- 4.Deprivation and social support theory
- 5.Charismatic leadership theory

#### **1. The Church Growth theory**

Gavran (2025) states that churches spread rapidly as a result of evangelism, in fulfillment of the great commission in (Mark 16: 15). Therefore, churches increased when the gospel is preached adequately.

#### **2. Political Economy of Religion Theory**

Zenodo (2024) posits that church is both spiritual and economic organization which offers hope and comfort to the troubled and serves as a means of livelihood to the poor and the unemployed. As the commercialization of the gospel shows, that prayer, healing and counseling are offered in exchange for seed sowing, tithe and offering.

#### **3. Sociological and Institutional Fracture Theory**

Zenodo (2024) avails that the proliferation of churches are caused by leadership tussle, lack of promotion, greed, and mismanagement of the church fund. Therefore, the aggrieved members break away to establish their churches.

#### **4. Deprivation and Social Support Theory**

According to Donald (2025) Some individuals who are passing through financial crisis turn to church for empowerment and financial support. As a result of welfare services the churches increased.

## 5. Charismatic Leadership Theory

Gavran (2025) avails that the leaders with the spiritual gifts of healing, working of miracles and prophecy attract many followers and live in affluence, as some members follow with the ambition to be like them, they obey the leaders until they have gotten enough followers and seced to establish their churches so that they will live in affluence too.

### Types Of Call

The call of God is a unique divine invitation to do an assignment for God in the world, for the furtherance of the gospel. There are two major types of call, namely general and specific call.

1. **General Call:** Is the call to all believers to evangelize the world for Christ (matt.28:19-20).
2. **Specific Call:** Specific call is when God calls an individual for a unique assignment for him like Moses, Abraham, Peter and Paul. Carleton (2022) posits that Christians believe that, only a divine call can bring one into the ministry, because there comes a time when only the grace of God can keep him going in the ministry.

### The Way God Calls People

The ways God calls people are as follows:

- i. Through the direct voice of God. (John 10:27) Moses (EX 3:1-22) was called to deliver the Israelites from the Egyptian bondage, in the burning bush.
- ii. Samuel was called at the age of nine years to be a prophet (1samuel 3:1-4).
- iii. Abraham was called to be the father of all nations (Gen12:1-9)
- iv. Saul also known as Paul was called to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:1-19)
- v. Peter was called to become fishers of men (Luke 5 :1-11).
- vi. Some people were called in the dream to preach the word of God in season and out of season.

Okobia (2003) avails that God calls people in his own way, because everybody is created distinctively. When God calls an individual he or she will have an extra ordinary encounter that will make him or her remember that experience often.

In Ephesians 4:11-12) God gave different ministerial gifts to people for the perfection of the saints, for the work of the ministry and for the edification of believers. Hamon (2023) opines that the

fivefold ministry written in (Ephesians 4:11), are the apostles, the prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. These ministerial gifts are giving to individuals to enable them train, nurture, teach and prepare Christians to walk on the part of righteousness and work for God.

Idowu (2024) posits that the apostles, prophets, evangelist, pastors and teacher operate under the five main offices in the spiritual government and the apostle is the senior. The problem with proliferation is that some ministers establish churches when they are not apostles and without God's approval because of insubordination. The apostles are the ones to establish churches for the pastors and prophets while the evangelists win souls for God and bring them to church for the teachers to teach them and the pastors and the prophets to nurture them to grow spiritually.

Idowu (2024) posits that since the advent of Christianity in 19<sup>th</sup> century, many churches have sprang up and Christianity has contributed greatly in the development of Nigerians, such as the eradication of illiteracy, through schools, improved health care, through hospitals, acquisition of skills such as carpentry and brick laying through the Church Missionary Society (CMS) missionaries.

The establishment of printing press for the production of books and the enlightenment of Nigerians through schooling which led to the desire for independence and the eradication of human sacrifice in Nigeria. Through the church the right moral virtues such as honesty, love, fidelity and hardwork have been inculcated for the good of all.

Harmon (2023) avails that the proliferation of churches which supposed to promote development and eradicate moral decadence has contributed little, compared to the number of the churches and the adherents. Although, the spread of churches is not evil in itself but the reason behind the spread.

### **The Causes Of The Proliferation Of Churches In Nigeria**

The causes of the proliferation of churches in Nigeria according to Eme (2024) are thus:

1. **Disregard for hierarchy:** The church was organized in a hierarchical order right from the beginning. In Acts 2:42, it was recorded that they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers, meaning that the early church was run according to the apostles' directives and teachings.

In Acts 15:4, Paul and Barnabas reported to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem what God has done through them, because they recognized the authority of the apostles over them. Also, in Galatians chapter 2 verse 2 Paul went to Jerusalem to explain the gospel messages he preached to the Gentiles to the leaders of the church in Jerusalem. These scriptures show the existence of hierarchy in the early church.

Eme (2024) states that adherence to ecclesiastical order restricted individuals from breaking away and establishing churches without being called by God to do so in the early church but the absence of hierarchical structure that line out the rules and process to priesthood and the establishment of

churches led to the founding of many churches by the unqualified self-appointed General Overseers in Nigeria

2. **Doctrinal disputation:** The misinterpretation of the bible by some pastors and doctrinal disparities have given rise to quarrel and schisms in some denominations. A church leader must have good knowledge of the scripture so that he will not misinterpret the bible and the members that have good knowledge of the bible will not challenge him for preaching heresy which can lead to schisms and secession.
3. **The desire for independence:** The human tendency to be a leader and independence, creates problems in many churches, as some individuals felt that they have acquired enough knowledge that will enable them establish their own churches without reporting to anybody, made some pastors to establish their churches as they want to be on top and commanding other people. Furthermore, the independence of most churches made many unqualified individuals to establish churches as nobody is checking their beliefs and practices.
4. **Poverty:** The plague of poverty in the lives of many Nigerians, made many people who are not called to be pastors, to establish churches to enrich themselves through manipulation and exploitation of their members. Fakoya (2023) states that Pentecostalism is a commercial venture under the cover of religion, with the root of exploitation and deception of the ignorant adherents for their own, financial gain. As they make merchandise of the gospel and lay more emphasis on giving, tithing and selling of handkerchief, olive oil and water at exorbitant prices. As an average Nigerian want to escape from poverty by all means, they turn to God for breakthrough, transformation and supernatural supplies.
5. **Easy entrance to the priesthood:** Free access to priesthood, and lack of laid down rules governing the establishment of churches and lack of theological training before founding church contributed greatly to the proliferation of churches in Nigeria. In many Pentecostal churches the senior pastor or general overseer appoints the pastors under him whether they are genuinely converted and called or not. This free and easy entrance makes it easy for the subordinate pastors to break out from the churches they are pastoring to found their own churches. That is why there are many schisms in Pentecostal churches which contributed greatly to the degeneration of human character and conditions of living as their emphasis have been shifted from holiness to materialism.
6. **Materialism:** Chadie (2024) opines that the success in this era is measured by individual's ability to acquire wealth irrespective of the source of the wealth. Many churches sprung up because of materialism, as they crave for wealth by building churches for commercial purposes. They teach their members that there is correlation between godliness and wealth and poverty is a sin, as God is a rich God. In some churches, people who give huge amount of money to the church are respected and prayed for, for more blessings. These preachers

twist the word of God to suite their selfish interest and their message is according to their needs.

### **The churches that seceded from Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries and Church of God Mission in Ika Land**

The churches that seceded from Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, according to (J. B. Omijie, personal communication, March 4 2025) are as follows:

1. Ancient of Days church founded by Pastor Peter Nduka
2. House of Peace Ministry founded by Pastor Matthew Okoh
3. Triumphant Assembly founded by Pastor James Okwukwe
4. Divine Mandate, established by pastor Mike Chuks

The churches that seceded from Church of God Mission in Ika Land according to (J. T. Donald, personal communication June 12 2025) are thus:

1. New Creation Church, founded by Pastor Bethel Okocha
2. Ever increasing Faith Church, founded by Obed Osazuwa
3. Liberty Gospel Church Agbor, founded by Pastor Samuel Efan.

### **The Effects Of Proliferation Of Churches In Nigeria**

The ambivalence of the proliferation of churches in Nigeria have both positive and negative effects. Proliferation of churches is not bad in itself, but the problem lies with the excesses of some pastors who lack the fear of God and practice falsehood and deception in their churches in order to enrich themselves and answer General overseer.

### **The Positive Effects Of The Proliferation Of Churches**

The positive effects of the proliferation of churches are thus:

- a. **Peace and stability:** According to Kehinde (2025) the availability of many churches made many people to embrace Christianity which made crime rate not to be worse than what it is today. The proliferation of churches has restrain human excesses in the society as crime and corruption would have been worse than what it is today, without these churches. As church is still the moral watch dog of the society, a custodian of moral virtues and a moral compass of the nation.

- b. **Leadership development:** The proliferation of churches in Nigeria has helped to build leadership capacity in the pastors who were compelled to develop strong faith and character to lead their church members. According to Okafor (2023) the pastors are devoted to duty in order to achieve success in ministry by sacrificing everything for the growth of their churches.
- c. **The spread of the gospel:** The proliferation of churches has made the gospel to spread to every nook and cranny of Nigerian society and the gospel is preached to every creature. As the churches are everywhere, that is how the word of God is being preached. Even those that do not go to church hear the word of God everyday.

Okobia (2023) posits that they embark on soul wining with zeal in order to evangelize the people. They used magazines and tracts to preach to people, individually and follow them up until they are matured spiritually and well established in church because, evangelism is their supreme task and to populate the churches with members.

According to (J. B. Omijie, personal communication, March 4 2025)

Pastor James Okwukwe seceded from Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries and was always transferred to small Churches in the villages, for that reason he was very poor because the Churches were not able to meet his financial needs. When he established his church, he started prospering because the Church grew with in two years and his financial status changed.

Egun, personal communication, April 5 2025) said that Happy a notorious criminal who was disturbing the neighborhood with stealing started Pastor James Okwukwe's church got converted and stopped stealing, and the neighborhood had peace.

### **The Negative Effects Of Proliferation Of Churches**

Chaddie (2024) avails that some of the pastors that established their churches were instructed to do so by God, and contributed greatly to the furtherance of the gospel. The challenge is the evil practices of some of them. The negative effects of proliferation of churches are thus:

1. **Exploitation and manipulation of the members for financial gain:** They extort money from their members by emphasizing much on giving and tithing, sowing of different seeds, such as covenant seed, life seed, prosperity seed, fruitfulness seed, and redemption seed. All the gimmick are done in order to enrich their pockets. These exploitation and manipulation have made many individuals to stop going to church and concluded that church is a business venture were pastors make merchandize of the gospel. Some of the members that remain, look for money through evil means as emphasis have been shifted from holiness to materialism.
2. **Lack of total dependence on God:** Okobia (2023) states that many of them lack genuine salvation and fear of God, as such they do anything for their churches to grow. They use

charm to draw members to their churches instead of praying to God for ministerial breakthrough. They practice syncretism for financial gain by instructing their ignorant members and their miracle seekers victims to bring huge amount of money for spiritual work of protection, progress and business breakthrough. They see fake vision for them in order to capture their attention and make them to remain in their churches

3. **Misinterpretation of the scripture:** Dim (2024) avails that they interpret the scriptural passages to suit their evil purposes, because they lack the knowledge of biblical exergies. Some of the pastors interpret the bible or scripture according to their personal ideas. Questionable doctrines and false teachings are on the increase in these churches, in order to retain their members. They preach messages to suit the yearnings of their members such as overemphasis on God's blessing, grace, love and mercy of God without touching the other side of God such as salvation justice and wrath of God for the members to repent from their sins and live holy lives.
4. **Unhealthy rivalries and disunity:** The proliferation of churches has made many churches to become commercial centres in order to be successful. They struggle to have magnificent buildings, flashy cars and flamboyant lifestyles. "They compare themselves with themselves and measure themselves among themselves are not wise" (2 Cor. 10:12). They struggle to be among the successful churches. They envy one another, castigate one another and discourage their members from attending other churches programmes to avoid losing them.

Pastor Mike Chuks seceded from Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, and established his church called Divine Mandate. He started very well, but after two years of hunger and poverty, he went to acquire evil power for the church to grow, the church grew within a short time and was asked to sacrifice 15 years old boy as he and the witch doctor were about to sacrifice him in his church the vigilancy group caught them red handed and were banished from the town.

Pastor Samuel Efan, seceded from Church of God Mission to found his church called Liberty Gospel Church. The church refused to grow for many years, and he suffered lack and want to the extent that he could not afford to take his sick child to the hospital and the child died. He packed to the village as he was unable to pay his rent in the town.

## Findings

The findings on the ambivalence of the proliferation of churches in Nigeria are as follows:

1. Unemployment and poverty made some individuals to establish their churches as a means of livelihood.
2. Some founders are living in affluence while their members are living in abject poverty.

3. There is shift from salvation and holiness preaching to prosperity gospel which lowered the ethical standard of the church.
4. Despite the spread of churches and increased in the numerical strength of Christians, there is low level of integrity and high level of crime, corruption and moral decadence.
5. It made many people to be converted and started to go to church regularly.
6. It restored hope to the hopeless through counseling, prayer and financial support.
7. It enhanced community development, through employment, education, health care services and empowerment.

### **Conclusion**

The proliferation of churches in Nigeria shows that Nigerians are very religious and faith plays moral, social and spiritual roles in their lives. Furthermore, the spread of churches has enhanced moral values, social support, community development and job creation.

The negative side of the spread of churches has led to unhealthy, inter-denominational rivalry, commercialization of the gospel, exploitation of their ignorant members, false doctrine, noise pollution during worship services. The ambivalence is that, the proliferation of churches is a source of spiritual awakening, community development and a breeding ground for corruption and moral decadence.

### **Recommendations**

The researcher recommends the following:

1. Government should enforce laws against evil practices in the churches such as dumping, sexual assault and killing.
2. There should be strict rules and regulations guiding the establishment of churches.
3. There should be proper theological training before anyone should be allowed to preach the gospel and establish his church.
4. The government should close down the churches that are deviating from the biblical truth.
5. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) should work together to punish the pastors that are misbehaving.
6. Christians should study the bible in order to know the truth, so that they will not be deceived and duped.
7. There should be ethical accountability among church leaders.

8. The Christian Association (CAN) should punish the pastors that are deviating from the Christian norms.
9. The pastors should preach on salvation, holiness and love rather than over emphasis on prosperity.

### **Contribution To Knowledge**

This study contributes to knowledge by exposing the evil practices of some of the pastors to the public, so that they will not be manipulated and exploited.

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