

# The Proliferation of Churches in Modern Nigeria: A Socio-Political and Economic Reconsiderations

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## Abstract

The Nigeria geo-political landscape is dotted with the presence of various Christian churches and ministries to the chagrin of even onlooker. What teases the imagination of Nigerians is 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 researcher to beginning a critical investigations of the phenomenon of proliferation of Churches in Nigeria. The researcher finds histo-sociological and philosophical method relevant in executing the research. At the end of the research, the findings yield that the proliferation of churches and ministries in Nigeria is occasioned by variety of factors depending on historical epoch [pre-independent period, the 1960's -1970's, 1970's -1980's and 1980 to the present]. Notably, the 1980's period made it obvious that it was economic downturn that gave birth to such Christian churches and groups. The new church groups therefore became somewhat an escape route for the timing population of Nigerians, more especially the youth, who could no longer find future in Nigerian polity and society. Here the church offered and still offers hope in a seeming forlorn situations. The conclusion of this work therefore is in spite of the various criticism levelled against the mushrooming of churches and ministries in the Nigerian geo-political scenery, their presence has been quite relevant in maintain stability as Nigeria would have been more awful than the European society of Thomas Hobbes's description.

**Keywords:** The Proliferation, Churches, Modern Nigeria, Socio-Political, Economic.

## 1. Introduction

The desire of Africans and of course entire humanity is to be accepted, regarded and valued in the society, and this was salient motive behind the quest and craze for independence by Africans [Nigeria]. The situation that warranted this quest was captured by Baur [2005] as he made reference to the Song of Songs chapter 1;5-6 and summated 'The sunburnt bride that here speaks is the church of Africa. Through the centuries Africa had to experience the lovelessness of the sons of her mother: the white men, who devastated her vineyard and forced her to work in the vineyard of the other people –to live in slavery' [xix]. Therefore, to establish their personhood in a society that depersonalized them, Africans found their solution in religion [African Christianity]. Hence, Okoro [2012] notes, 'The Negro [Black-African] church came into being in the history of United States first as an invisible institution on the Southern plantation, secondly, as a reaction to discrimination in the white churches [251-259 see also Scheiner 1969:197].

Here in Nigeria, religion [African Christianity] played a pivotal role in gaining independence from the colonialist as the Christianity brought to the African soil vis-à-vis Nigeria was an extension of colonial magisterium and a representation of avid discrimination of Africans. Here, Baur [2005] notes, 'The internal life of the protestant mission in West Africa, at least in Nigeria, received its distinctive character from the nationalistic movement called Ethiopianism. It was basically not a political but a religious movement, expressing nationalistic aspiration in the church. .... In West Africa, Ethiopianism was more sentimental and cultural than a struggle for a just representation in church government and only then disappointed by the racial discrimination on the part of the missionaries and such resulted in secession [125]. In the white missionary church, the European missionaries considered their subordinates, African staff as 'infants' and themselves as 'tutors and governors' [see Baur 2005:125-126] Henry Venn's euthanasia of mission, in which he proposed an independent African native church, snowballed the African elites in the church to take full independence of African native church and this became a litmus test for their capacity to achieving political independence. Here the Reverend James Johnson came to the fore [see Okoro 2002; 34, Baur 2005: 127]. Consequently, the emergence of African independent churches. It is therefore the quest to attain both spiritual and socio-political independence and authentic humanity that motivated Africans to seceding from the mainline churches. However, as Kubi and Torres (1983) Posits, "various authors have given various reasons for the genesis of A.I.C. Many who have studied the phenomenon under the new religious movements in Africa have suggested political, economic, social, deprivation and discrimination as the major causes (117). In the opinion of Kubi and Torres (1983), spiritual hunger was the main cause of this development in West Africa, while in central Africa, politics and spirituality informed the formation of the A.I.C. (see Agha 2013: 42). It is against this backdrop that the period from the late nineteenth century has witnessed the upsurge of a number of churches, which were indeed an African strand of Christianity fabricated in Africa by Africans to suit the African context. In the main, these churches came to be referred to by various names as Separatist, Ethiopian, Zionist, Spiritual, Prophetic movements, Messianic

movements and Praying Churches (see <http://www.what-when-how.com/religious-movements-in-africa>). With particular reference to Eastern Nigeria, Gilfford [1993] notes, 'One of the most remarkable trend of the last decade among Christian population of Southern Nigeria has been the rise of the so-called 'Charismatic' or Pentecostal movements' [8] The literal mushrooming of new church organizations between the last decade in the Nigerian geo-social and political landscape forming a great company of new religious and social political force in Nigeria is here considered with mix-feelings of joy and anxiety.

The development of the A.I. Cs was essentially a paradigm shift and a challenge to the Eurocentric disposition of the mainline churches in Africa (see <http://www.what-when-how.com/religious-movements-in-africa>). These new churches were free from any missionary and colonial entanglement as they adopted the self-supporting, self-governing and self-self-extending paradigm of Henry Venn as their benchmark policy. Consequently, the A.I. Cs became authentic African expressions of Christianity. The effect of this new and contextual expression of Christianity on African churches was the alarming rate of the exodus of members of the mainline/historic churches to joining the A.I.Cs. (see <http://www.what-when-how.com/religious-movements-in-Africa>.) Africans should be applauded for this great feat of establishing their own independent churches, where they could worship God in their native tongue and way.

However, this religious development has certainly not become panacea for peace and expected African dignity. (Fayomi, 1993: 27-31). Again, Fayomi (1993), described Nigeria as a "fertile soil for the growth of independent churches with all its crises and opportunities" (27-31]. After the secession of A.I. Cs from the mainline churches, the quest for independence and control of power has led to constant growth and spread of independent churches. The growth of independent churches has helped in the areas of "rapid evangelization, development of new leadership, promoted specialization in ministry and enhanced the provision of an atmosphere in which human problems are at times solved (Adesanya 2004:55-60). On the other hand, the demerits include, personal clashes, unhealthy competition for convert via homiletical propaganda, lack of unity, monetary crises, heresies, fanaticism and bickering (Tokunbo, 2007:2-3). These socio-spiritual and politico-economic quagmire, in which the Nigeria church found herself elicited the design of this paper with the aim of discovering the socio-political implications/evaluation of the proliferation of churches in modern Nigeria.

## **2. The Origin, Development and Varieties of Independent Churches in Africa (Nigeria).**

There are various causes that instigated an independent church movement (Peter 1997:14). Berrett (1968), notes that "a number of factors produce the tribal "zeitgeist" (spirit of the times), with its tendencies toward independence, as these factors exert their influence, the level of separation is heightened" (14). Therefore, Peter (1997) asserts that "one of these factors is the failure of one party to be sympathetic to another party's point of view. Missionaries have sometimes not fully understood or appreciated the Africans' point of view, which is deeply rooted in his culture, some have also not recognized that area of the African culture that is compatible with the Christian message" (14). Thus differences in cultural orientation with the west and rest of us have in many occasions resulted into tensions that led to the formation of an independent church.

As was observed by John (2005), the first foundations of independent churches were the result of schismatic, that is separatist movements of protest: In south Africa, a first secession happened in 1872 and in Nigeria in 1888, the formative period in both countries fell into the years from 1890 to 1920 (14). In South Africa, the movement was even favored by some missionaries who advocated separate native churches because Africans in a European church "would always have to play second fiddle" (see Sundkler 1961). However, in Nigeria the independent churches chose the common name of "African", while in South Africa the independent churches called themselves "Ethiopian" (see John, 2005: 14). The native church leaders had adopted the name 'Africa' in the hope that in future the African church shall be a national church in Africa [ Webster 1973:92 see also John 2005: 490-491]. To achieving this aspiration, the adopted Henry Venn's three 'S' paradigm of self-propagating, self-supporting and self-governing. The church achieved a great milestone within the few years of their chequered beginning. Thus in Lagos alone, they were more than twelve distinct independent churches established within a record time, besides the four [4] that seceded from the missionary churches [see John 2005:490]. Guided by the vision of unity, the different African native churches in Nigeria of all shades maintained the same identity with each other and their mother churches, speaking eloquently that separation is more of socio-political than religious.

After this first wave of the formation of the African independent churches [Nigerian experience] there came a second wave, which emerged from diverse historical, doctrinal and spiritual exigencies. The period began around 1920s and occupied the socio-spiritual horizon till 1960s. The dominant kind of African churches, was prophetic-charismatic in character (John 2005:490). Here, John (2005) observes:

As a rule, a prophet or prophetess, gifted with healing powers gathered a group of followers which soon became so distinct from other church members that had to form their own church. Some of the first founders were Isaiah Shembe in South Africa, Wade Harris in Ivory Coast and Garrick Braid in Nigeria. In Nigeria, among the Yoruba, a parallel movement started when

in the great epidemic of 1918, people experiencing the inefficiency of the medical help of the mission churches, gathered in prayer groups called Aladura (people of prayer). Their way of praying and healing departed from the Anglican tradition and they had to establish their own church in 1922 (14).

Reiterating this fact, Webster (1973), notes that in the 1920s there was an outbreak of serious sickness-bubonic plague and small-pox that killed many people. Then, the Seraphim was established in Lagos in 1925 (9). The Aladura and seraphim groups teamed up to preach on the power of prayer and many people were healed (Agha 2013: 42). The founding of the sacred order of Cherubim and seraphim was as a result of Moses' (who was a cripple's) encounter with Angel Michael in a vision, who mandated him to start the church with immediacy and urgency and in the process he was completely healed (Hopkins, 1998: 17). Thus Eternal sacred order of cherubim and seraphim was the first independent church in Nigeria (Agha 2013: 42). In 1927, there was a wide spread of Aladura churches to Abeokuta, Ijebu, Ibadan, Ife, Ilesha and Ondo. In each of these cities they attracted large followers and many souls who later formed their own groups were won (Agha 2013:42). Early Aladura churches include the Eternal sacred order of the cherubim and seraphim society founded in 1925, and the church of the lord (Aladura), founded in 1930. Around 1918, an Anglican formed a prayer group known as the precious stone (Diamond) society to heal influenza victims. The group left the Anglican Church in the early 1920s and affiliated with faith Tabernacle church based in Philadelphia (see Anderson 2001: 80-82; Gaiya 2002:5).

Within the period of 1930's another type of African Independent churches [the Nigeria experience] emerged. It was Joseph Babalola of faith Tabernacle church, who led a revival that converted thousands that pivoted this strand of AIC. Having made great spiritual leap, his movement in 1932 initiated ties with the Pentecostal Apostolic church of Great Britain, but the association dissolves over the use of modern medicine. In 1941, Babalola founded the independent Christ Apostolic church, which is estimated to have over a million members by 1990 (see Anderson 2001:86-87). Foreign Pentecostal denominations such as the Welsh Apostolic church (1931), the Assemblies of God (1939) and the Four Square Gospel church (1954) were also introduced during this period (see <http://www.pewforum.org/2006/10/05/historical-overview-of-pentecostalism-in-nigeria>). In the 1950s, the celestial church of Christ arrived in western Nigeria from Benin Republic. The church spreads and becomes one of Africa's largest Aladura churches. In 1952, a former member of the cherubim and seraphim society, Pa Josaih Akindayomi, founded the Redeemed Christian church of God. Under Enoch Adejare Adeboye the church becomes increasingly Pentecostal in theology and grows from an estimated 42 congregations in 1980 to around 7,000 in 2004 (see Anderson 2001:85).

In another development, Ojo [1993] spotlighted on other type of Christian reawakening that swept across Nigeria in the 1970's, according to him, the reawakening/revival could be described either as Evangelical or Pentecostal. However, the movement according to him, though coming from diverse means and roots maintained uniformity of teachings, activities and mobility of members. Therefore, though different in origin they grouped them and described them under a single typology as either charismatic revival or charismatic movement [161]. According to Ojo, the charismatic movement entered the Nigerian socio-religious geography in the early 1970's as a branch of Protestant Christianity. In his own words

The movement first began as a sort of revival among certain groups of Christian students in high institution of learning. The emphases of revival were on personal salvation, baptism of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, in the last decade other emphases such as healing, miracles and evangelism have been added [161].

Ojo traced the origin of such charismatic/Pentecostal movements to America as he asserts that in style and rhetoric, the charismatic movement has been greatly influenced by America Pentecostal, through literature, radio and TV broadcasts or through their personal visits to Nigeria [161]. It against this backdrop that Agha (2013) maintains that Pentecostalism did not originate in Nigeria (42). One school of thought assert that the spirit of Pentecostalism in Nigeria became ripe after the Nigeria- Biafra civil war in 1970. People were influenced by the total dependence on prayer for healing, miracles and for the intervention of the Holy Spirit (see Agha 2013:42). However, originating in evangelical student revivals, a wave of Pentecostal expansion spans new churches in the 1960s and 1970s. A leader of this expansion was Benson Idahosa, one of Africa's most influential Pentecostal preachers (see Ojo 2004:3). Here Gaiya (2002) posits:

Idahosa established the church of God mission international in 1972. In 1974, the Pentecostal umbrella organization of Grace of God ministry is founded in Eastern Nigeria. The deeper life Bible church is founded in 1975, and soon becomes one of Nigeria's largest neo Pentecostal churches, with estimated 350,000 members by 1993 (15).

Following from this development, new charismatic churches mushroomed between 1980s and 1990s. In 1986, David Oyedepo founded Living Faith Outreach Worldwide, popularly known as "Winners' Chapel". It opens a Faith clinic" in the suburbs of Lagos in 1999 that seats 50,000 people (see Ojo 2004:4).

Notably, several motives accounts for the proliferation of African independent churches. Some of the

major reasons range from socio-political, economic, spiritual etc. Some of the churches developed as a result of discontent from older churches, while some emerged as a result of spiritual quest. Some also got split from other independent churches for reasons ranging from power, economical, racial etc. Thus Agha [2013] summates that the breakup was usually among themselves or from the mainline churches. Most of the schisms occurred after the Nigeria civil war in 1970 and until now splits continues to happen every day (87). Agha (2013), also notes other reasons of proliferation of African Independent Churches as urbanization, unemployment, desire for genuine evangelism, claim to be 'called by God', unwillingness to accept discipline and desire to build one's own empire [187] Remarkably, the African independent churches constitute a significant portion of Christianity in Africa and a unique Spirit in African Christianity. The development of the independent churches has attained a dimension unparalleled in the history of the Christian church. These independent churches have been founded by separation from parent churches, missions or independent churches-in a few cases, under the initiative of a dynamic leader. Such ministries may be found in many countries of Africa, especially south of the Sahara and these ministries have a huge influence on the population (see [www.http://nairaproject.com/project](http://www.nairaproject.com/project)).

### 3. Basic Doctrines of Independent Churches in Nigeria

There is no impenetrable screen between mission churches and African independent churches. The same holds true of the three types of independent churches already discussed. This is because there is a constant exchange of ideas and evaluations between representatives of all those different groups, whereby one group contributes to the understanding of the other (see Schaff 1910:2-27). Peter (2005) avers that most of the movements have emerged spontaneously in areas where Christian missionary activity has been effective and some of the stronger groups have come from a renewal movement. The independent religious movement reveals a dynamic working of the spirit that transcends the doctrinal and organizational partitions of denominations. However, the Christian movements are surrounded by a syncretistic fringe consisting of movements with non-Christian religious systems at their center (454). It is against this backdrop that Okoro [2014] maintains that African religious sociology is complex, as it maintains an eclectic doctrinal, liturgical and ritualistic syncretism [76]. However, the doctrinal and liturgical differentiations within the African independent churches could be known through their roots. Underscoring the factuality of this assumption, Peter [2005] maintains that the secessionist/separatists churches have no doctrinal issues with the mother churches hence they retain the doctrinal and liturgical pattern of their mother churches [456]. In his own word,

The larger independent churches basically retain the liturgical patterns of the churches from which they seceded. However, they give expression to their faith and emotions in culturally relevant forms. Naturally, songs composed by Africans and set in African tunes are used more extensively. Frequently, African music enriches the service [456-457]

In this group of Independent church, the members crave not only for African identity but also for African togetherness and community living among themselves, which were overtly absent in the White missionary churches. Hence the heart of the formation of the separatist African Independent churches is expressed in the group both in worship and in fellowship as evidenced in the formation of prayer groups and small fellowship groups within the larger church [ see Peter 2005: 458]. Here again, preaching of sermon are giving a prominent space in every worship and meeting. This is borne out of the fact that the bible occupies a central position in the liturgy of the church. Bible study in which every member participates actively is also an essential part of the programme/activity of this African independent church type.

The African independent churches [the Aladura slant] as Daniel (1970) notes are however, syncretistic and retain such traditional practices as reverence of ancestral spirits, purification rites, and polygamy [232]. These group of African independent churches place more emphases on prayers and as such they are nicknamed praying churches. The title 'praying church' is one of the designations the Yoruba indigenous church leaders cherish most. Hence, they call their movements 'Ijo Aladura' (Praying church), because, according to them, they devote a substantial time to saying prayers; and their constant theme is the power of prayer. (see Deji and Ademola 1997:1] For the Aladura group of churches, prayer is a master key that can unlock any Iron door. Therefore, they believe firmly in the of power prayer, which they claim is under estimated and used sparingly by the mainline churches (see Agha 2013: 65). The effective use of prayer in healing and dispelling evil spirits and witches is one of the strong reasons why many people abandoned their mother church and flock to the Aladura group of churches The members claim that when they say prayers accompanied with the ringing of bells and shouts of Halleluiah, they are able to dispel problems of witchcrafts, barrenness in women, the evil that cause unemployment, lack of progress in one's profession and other problems of misfortune in life (see Agha, 2013: 65).

Furthermore, the Aladura group of churches have been able to notch out some doctrinal niches as they give baptism and purification rites important places in the doctrinal/liturgical ladder [see Peter 2005:458]. During worship, there is always an ecstatic outburst as the members speak in diverse tongues, typifying the first Pentecost in the upper-room. Most often there is no defined liturgy or programme of worship as the members are

permitted to interject hymns and choruses in between other activities. Faith healing through the laying on of hands also obtain large space in the liturgy of the Aladura group of Churches. Explicating on the basic liturgical and doctrinal nature of this group of churches Deji and Ademola [1997] writes

A consultation arranged by the world council of churches at Kitwe in 1962 classified what the Yoruba call Aladura churches within three criteria namely: a. they emphasis the work of the holy spirit; b. they make reference to various forms of revelation and healing and c. they stress re-interpretation of Christianity in terms of felt needs of the local culture (1).

In Deji and Ademola [1997] opinion, the Aladura group of churches are categorized also prophetic movements. Some African scholars prefer to describe these churches as “Prophetic-Healing movements”. This is apparent because virtually all these churches are focused upon the charismatic personality of a prophet and most often depend on visions and prophecies (see Deji and Ademola 1997:1).

The other slant of African Independent churches come under the general taxonomy of ‘Pentecostal/Pentecostalism’. However, Ruth [1993] in her epic work titled, *Pentecostalism in Southern Nigeria: An Overview* made an apt distinction of the different strands of Pentecostalism in Nigeria, though she allowed them come under the general cover of ‘The Born-Again Community’ [8-9]. In allowing the new African Independent churches instead of coming under the phenomenal terminology ‘Pentecostalism’ to come under the general umbrella name “Born-Again Community” Ruth underscores the salient point that the new church movement in Africa, though founded in African soil by perhaps Africans have their root in Euro-American revival of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and depend on their foreign roots for inspirations and guidance. In Her own words,

Given the foreign origin of this movement, the obvious similarities at the level of formal doctrines and rituals, as well as the propensity for believers themselves to rely on literature and religious education from abroad, one can easily assume that the Nigeria churches are much of the muchness with their foreign brethren...yet in labelling such movements ‘Evangelical’, ‘Charismatic’, ‘Pentecostal’ or ‘Fundamentalist’ one risks making identification which ignores the very specific and crucial innovations and reinventions emerging in the very creative process of appropriation and reconstruction. ...Therefore, characterizing the movement as Pentecostal, which refers to a specific set of doctrinal tenets and ritual ignores the heterogeneity of the movement. Not only are there serious differences in the social bases of various churches and para-church organizations, the varying degree of denominational affiliation as well as the ways in which they insert themselves into the current socio-political context of urban south, one is left with the impression that there is no one movement but several [9]

Therefore, it is more academic honest to describe the movement in terms of their particular doctrines, ritual and practice as it is found rather than make a blind categorization of the movements under one cover name following the foreign example. Against this backdrop, this present study adopts the taxonomy of Ruth [1993] by classifying the African Independent churches often grouped under the cover name Pentecostalism into two families, namely the ‘Holiness family’ and the ‘Pentecostal family’.

It was Ojo [1988] that made clear distinction between the denominational churches [Pentecostal] that were established by the mission churches by the Euro-American missionary enterprises and evangelists from the late 1920 to 1950’s. Included in this group according to Ojo are the Faith Tabernacle, The Apostolic Church, The Apostolic Faith and The Assemblies of God Church. Other interdenominational groups were started in the University campuses with majority of its membership coming from students and headed by University lecturers. With the passage of time these interdenominational fellowships grew into churches in predominantly urban cities and with literate populations [see Ojo 1988; 141-162]. It was this first group that form the historical basis and the doctrinal cornerstone of the ‘Holiness’ movement [See Ruth 1993:11]. The doctrinal concern in the churches styled holiness group is ‘Perfection’ which is the outgrowth of strict personal disciple. Here the inerrancy of the scripture in all personal and public matters is held without compromise. Accordingly, this is juxtaposed against the way of the world, which is styled the way of sin and hell and those [believers] who are already on the highway of heaven or rather homeward to eternity must separate themselves from the world and hellish realms/activities.

The Holiness group of African independent churches place emphases on the presence, influence and working of the Holy Spirit in the life and among believers in fellowship, however as noted by Ojo, their services are not highly emotional, nor do members of the congregation typically fall into ecstasy during corporate worship. The liturgical formularies are quite simple as hymn singing is preferred to noisy music typical of Africa and modern Euro-American rocks. [ See Ruth 1993:12]. The doctrinal emphases are the millennial, the signs of imminent return of Christ and the rapture. To this group of churches, evangelism is a supreme task and divine commission. Here, tribalism is deemphasized as members consider one another as brothers and sisters.

‘Holiness’ churches according Ojo [1988] set their doctrine and practice in contraposition to the mainline denominations, especially the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches. They also treat any church organization that have a ting of African traditional culture or romance with African native phenomenon as the

devil's coven and hellish ploy against the kingdom agenda. Therefor the Aladura group of churches are treated with great disdain by the holiness group. It is also noted that among this group, there is great leaning towards Euro-American civilization. Hence Ruth [1993] notes:

The tendency for members to wear western dress, listen to western-styled gospel music and consume western religious literature reinforces the reaction against 'primitive, heathenism' and stresses the self-consciously 'modernist' and internationalist' aspect of the regenerative process on both an individual and social level [14].

The next group within the 'Born-Again Community' is what is broadly called the 'Pentecostals'. However, for the purpose of distinction/clarity, this present work has adopted a limited nomenclature 'Prosperity family/group'. The prosperity group of African independent churches mushroomed the Nigeria socio-religious landscape as a result of the increased missionary activities within 1960's and 1970's. Notably, this sparked off great reawakening that resulted in a trans-denominational 'charismatic' movement of 1970's and 1980's. The outgrowth of the evangelistic output of this period resulted in the movement generally called 'Pentecostal' by the general public. This prosperity group as called in this paper, has been the most rapid and powerful new force on the born-again religious scene of the country. [Ruth 1993:17]. The major doctrinal emphases of the prosperity group are experiential faith, the centrality of the Holy Spirit, and the spiritual gifts of speaking in tongues, faith healing and miracles.

The marked difference between the holiness group and the prosperity group is that while the former took a retreat from the world, the prosperity group adapts to the ideality that the world as a divine creation ought to be harnessed and enjoyed by the believers. Therefore, since God is the benefactor of the world, His sons and daughters - the believers should of right and necessity be the beneficiaries of the good things of the world. Accordingly, there are stipulated conditions of acquiring these spiritual and material prosperity. The first condition is the extent of giving behaviours of the believer. So the more one gives the more one expects divine prosperity [see Hollenweger, 1972: xvii]. According to Ruth [1993], the scriptural cornerstone of this group and doctrine is Mark 10:30. She associates this with the rise all over Africa of 'Faith Movement' as an out-growth of American evangelism on the continent [18]. Furthermore, stating the obvious, Agha (2013) avers:

The African independent Pentecostal and charismatic churches uphold and preach theology based on the achievement of the harvest of biblical promise of prosperity. According to them those in Christ shall never be in want and that a giver must always receive many folds from God. A giver never lacks.... The new spirituality in the modern African Pentecostals continues to empower people to overcome hopelessness and poverty and inspire them to embrace a prosperous and victorious life" (65).

Notably, current manifestations reveal the obvious facts that actually, membership to current Pentecostal 'Prosperity' slant is not central to one's identity as a member of a particular born-again community' hence many still maintain their membership with their mother churches –the mainline denominations. It is in line with these findings that Agha [2103] and Clarke [1986] at different times opine that both in their belief system, doctrine and practices, some of the Pentecostal churches are Anglican oriented as some of them separated from the Anglican Church to found their Pentecostal church (Agha 2013: 65). Clarke (1986) intones thus: 'The Pentecostal churches did not however, abandon all the teachings, practices, forms of worship and organizational procedure of their mother church [213]. Another typical characteristic of this group is that they value free [para-church] fellowships more than church denominational fellowship. Therefore, some of the members do not attend church regularly as they prefer to worship and pray in small and informal fellowship [see Ruth 1993:19]. This attitude is borne out of the fact that deep down in the psyche of the members of this new wave of Pentecostal churches, church denominational affiliation is not important.

However, some of them that have turn to church denominations, still have devoted members but this loyalty is tied to the charismatic and inspiring leader. The effect on the body of the church is that the church becomes very porous to ambitious pastors and open to schism which in the recent times has become the defining matrix of Pentecostal churches. In the words of Ruth [1993], 'Since the churches are notoriously schematic, owing to the struggle for clients in a competitive religious market, members appear to be easily won to new congregations when an inspiring leader breaks away to form his own church' [19].

#### **4. The Socio-Political and Economic Reconsideration of Independent Churches in Modern Nigeria Society**

The Nigerian economic ordeals seem to have started in the 1980's in contrast to the 1970's known as the Nigerian prosperous years and this period coincided with the period of rapid evangelization of Nigeria by various para-church groups. The period brought with it unemployment, soaring prices of goods and services, fraught infrastructure, wage freezes and inflation that followed the drop in international oil prices in 1981 and the Structural Adjustment Programme [SAP] of 1986 brought more austerity and hardship to all groups of people in Nigeria [see Ruth 1993:24]. The period also brought with it severe hardship and break down of relations at all levels as there was capital flight and the only group that have access to what could be called the good things of

life were the few politicians. The overall effects are that the youth and the middle class citizens lost hope of the future as corruption occupied the center stage of the socio-political and economic scene of the country. It was a pastor of one of the Born-Again-community, Pastor Michael Ojewale that gave an apt description of the scenario thus:

Fear and lack of confidence in the future are becoming the common currency of the day. Job seekers have no future to look up to, at least not from the system. We no longer trust anything or anyone. Those we have trusted have mortgaged us and held us to ransom for foreign loans, which we did not benefit from. Everything-absolutely everything-is on the verge of collapse. What more is still promising? What is it that is not declining? Is it education, health, agriculture, industry, politics, religion, marriage, or the family? No jobs, no money, no food, no clothing, no personal dignity. Any hope for tomorrow? [1-5 see also Ruth 1990:21-37]

With the situation on ground, religion becomes the only escape route that may offer hope, even if illusionary, to the hopeless generation. Therefore, on the individual level, more especially among the young people, it became in vogue to turn to the church, specially the Born-Again Community type, since the historic church seem to be an accomplice with the socio-political system that has defrauded the people. Thus turning to the new wave of Christianity offers courage and provides strength to face the odious storm of economic hardship. Here Ruth [1993] reiterates:

‘...Spiritually a new life in Christ offers strength and purpose in the face of difficulties. It provides for the individual a coherent and ordered moral universe which makes sense of the chaotic and seeming arbitrary nature of quotidian struggle and emphasizes the possibility of overcoming them [25].

The new religious [spiritual] connection also offers the individual an entrance into a new community of caring brothers and sisters/comrades, which had already been broken down in the secular/civil community. This new community transcends the ordinary ethnical/biological relationship, to an eternal relationship whose head is God Himself and Jesus Christ as a co-heir with all who enter into the family. The community therefore having been define beyond the geo-political and socio-economic interest, offers both moral and practical support to the members in times of needs [see Okoro and Osunwoke 2014 32-44].

Notably, the relatively egalitarian nature of this new wave of Christianity offers the youth the rare opportunity to mount to leadership rostrum, which both the mainline churches and the civil society deny them. This new position offers hope as it teased and test the ability of the young people in spiritual, material and human management. The new African independent churches also adopted African traditional humane/community living philosophy, as it lends institutional support both formally and informally in the areas of health care, family matters and stepping into the areas the government has side-stepped or avidly neglected.

For the women, becoming born-again offers amazing prospects. Though, the Pentecostal and Holiness doctrine advocates total submission of women to the men, more especially in the home, however, the emphases on marital fidelity, mutual respect and the sharing of family responsibilities means that the position of the women in the home and in their relationship with their husbands, especially poorer and less educated women is quite improved for better [Ruth 1993: 26]. Therefore, the women immediately cashed on the opportunity offered by the Born-Again church doctrine and often take defiant husbands to the pastor for counselling, adjudication and discipline. The Born-Again group of churches favour the nuclear family arrangement as opposed to the extended family arrangement and this relieves pressures on the in-laws on the part of the women and as such made her marriage more secured. It was Rurh [1993] that enunciated on the further benefits the women derive from joining the Born- Again group of Churches as she opines

...The choice of marriage partner is understood as belonging primarily to the prospective couples rather than their families, this frees women from often unwarranted arrangements made by their parents. Further, the proscription against fornication also enables women to resist unwanted sexual pressures which regularly brought to bear in cases where they need job, good grades or secured relationships. Young women find in the born-again community opportunities to construct a space where they can move with relative freedom and dignity and the institutional as well as moral and psychological support to ensure the maintenance of the space [ 21-37].

Another benefit the African Independent churches offer to the members is its treatment of cosmic/evil forces and spiritual oppressions. African Independent churches with their emphases on the spiritual forces underlying every event/activities of human being in the world finds strong metaphor in Nigeria traditional cosmologies. Here the belief that behind every event especially every misfortune, there is malevolent spirit responsible for it is one of the most commonplace belief of Africans, therefore, the new wave of African Christianity of all strands cashed on this ideology to offer the people a soothing explanation and solution [Okoro 2011:311-350]. Thus with the economic down turn, these evil/cosmic forces are considered to be in abundance, stealing wages, causing ill-health, accidents, barrenness, job-loss, and myriads of other social problems. Witchcraft and wizardry become a commonplace suspicion in the events of economic collapse, therefore, rather than taking a romantic approach to

these as found in the mainline churches, these new waves of African Christianity match the forces headlong with velocity, fire and brimstone. The new waves Churches proclaim both in theology and practice that the power in the name of Jesus is the only power that can overcome all the forces of this life [see Ruth 1990: 21-37]. It is therefore a truism that religion becomes the last and the only solution and solace for humanity in crisis situations. It offers the people a hope in a hopeless situations and the courage to face all the uncanny challenges of life. Thus in the idea of Karl Marx, social crisis gives credence to religion and Marx Webber ideality comes to bear in Nigeria situation with proliferation of churches, that religion is a means of social revolt and protest against the status-quo or the unjust social system

However, many scholars in the field of sociology, psychology and even religion have argued that the solution offered by religion are illusionary and diversionary as it encourages the people to ignore the root cause of their problems, which may range from economic crisis, government malfeasance, neglect etc. In an attempt to respond to this stern criticism of religion, Ruth [1993] avers;

It is not inconsistent to believe that the government is responsible for the social ills, while at the same time laying the blame for daily problems at the door of Satan. In fact, certain government practices are implicitly understood as satanic. What is more to the point is that people embrace that which offers both conceptual reorganization of a chaotic moral field, as well as practical solutions [27].

Notably, religion [Christianity] even if it does not address the real socio-political roots of an existential needs, has not only acted in history as succor providing apparatus to dissipating situations but has also acted as socio-political catalyst motivating both the individual and the group to confront their needs with zeitgeist confidence. Therefore, to hinge the social ill on the government for the non-religious/unbeliever is an ideal but to the religionist [Christian] it is a defeatist resignation to fate. The government on its own is also an abstract entity and as such is not readily accessible and thus as remote as the devil itself to the individual or the group in need. Therefore, instead of waiting or blaming the government or international financial system for one's daily problems, one takes what religion offers even if it is illusionary to get immediate psychological succor [see Okoro 2011 322-351]. Ruth [1993] caps the ideality in the following words, 'Deliverance service may not prevent problems or misfortune in the future or even solve present ones but they return agency to the individual through his active participation, empowering him in very discouraging circumstances' [28].

Notably, the church [new wave slant] has articulated and reconstructed disintegrating social and economic relationship in Nigeria, such as the breakdown of many patron-client networks, the failure of the state to provide welfare and the weakening of the role of extended family. The new wave of Christianity in Nigeria has been able to create a powerful sense of community, which is lacking in the modern Nigerian individualistic society. Thus, the mass of the believers [denominational affiliation notwithstanding] see themselves as part of the unique family, belonging to an international movement, whose identity and interest must be seriously guided and promoted. This is evidenced in the emergence of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria [PFN] as the national parasol for all the Born-again group. This association is becoming a powerful pressure group not only in Christian Association of Nigeria [CAN] but also in Nigeria politics. The formation and activities of PFN is a milestone in the attempt to institutionalize the sense of community within this new wave of Christianity in Nigeria [ see Ibrahim 1991:125 and also Ruth, 1993:29]. Here the designation 'born-again' creates an instant identification between individuals and immediately destroys the barring walls of ethnicity and tribalism that defines Nigerian socio-political system.

It has been raised within the Nigerian society and argued that the new wave [Born Again slant] Christianity's attachment to materialism is an unspeakably demonic. This attachment to the world is observed in what could be christened a 'bent doctrine' of prosperity as expressed in their dress habit, avarice and the ministers' propensity and audacity to acquire material benefit and power from the congregation. This has debilitating effect on both the gospel and the image of the church and the pastor and has prompted and still prompting negative criticisms. Ruth [1993] observes the public criticism of this attitude as she notes, 'It is very common to hear people from outside the community, whether Christians or members of other religious group comment on the venality of many pastors, most notably prosperity 'Pentecostal'...it is the biggest industry in the country' [30].

Actually, the criticism is not unfounded. Often financial interest is the operative factor moving men of God and church/ministry founders to beginning a ministry or church and often to secede from the older churches.

They claim that they were called by God and moved by the power of the Holy Spirit to plant new churches. Meanwhile, before the civil war and during the period of oil boom in 70s in Nigeria, hardly did any young man opt to become a pastor of any church except those called genuinely by God to serve him. Parents even objected to their children going to be trained to become pastors. They equated church work with poverty (Agha 2013:160). Furthermore, Agha (2013) summated:

The long period of military rule during and after the civil war in Nigeria (1966-1996) ushered in unemployment in Nigeria and this in turn brought about poverty and untold



hardship and misery on both old and young. Unemployment with its attended evils has affected the socio- economic, socio-political and socio-moral spectrum of the Nigerian society. It has contributed to too many people becoming perpetual armed robbers and kidnappers. Today everyone wants to be a politician in order to make fast money instead of serving humanity. Unemployment in Nigeria has become the bane of the society. It is therefore one of the causes of proliferation of churches in Nigeria. (160).

Some independent churches were established because the founders saw it as means of earning regular income in the face of hardship and unemployment. They regard the church as an industry that yield money, consequently, they continue to build more churches because the more the churches, the more money they make. The emphasis on prosperity has brought about the increasing and unprecedented commercialization of religion. It has become an avenue for some so called clergy and religious impostors to make fast money. Arch Bishop Olubummi Okojie (Sunday Concord, June 22, 1986) lamented that, ‘Some commercially minded people have been hiding under Christian garment to play on people’s superstition and human sorrow by establishing run-away proliferation of churches all over the country, particularly in the thickly populated areas’ [3-5]. Agha (2013) Therefore enunciates further “it has been claimed that some of these founders of churches do so as compensation for their failure to attain political and economic recognition in the area of government patronage and appointments. They believe that by founding a church, they in turn have attained self-fulfillment, more so, as they subsequently enjoy government recognition and respect as successful pastors (187). As was observed by Peter (1997), “Another significant factor (that leads to proliferation) is the desire of a strong personality to be independent and direct his own group according to his own interests. The feeling of being restricted in one’s activities by a church council has enhanced this tendency and caused separation (452). Some independent churches have been formed because of church discipline in the established church. When some people are disciplined, they gather others in similar circumstances to form an independent group (see Peter, 1997:452). The reasons for the proliferation of churches in modern Nigeria can hardly be exhaustive as long as unemployment, hardship, embezzlement of public-funds, poverty etc. are still on the increase. So far, one can ascertain that socio-political and economic challenges have aided the rise and spread of independent churches in Nigeria.

Ruth [1993] amidst the seeming negative appellations attached to this new wave of Christianity still justifies the positive impact of the faith to Nigerian society as her enunciates:

There is strong element of truth in all the criticisms...However, embracing some sort of ‘manipulation’ thesis in describing the rise of these churches does not explain why people continue to flock to them and give their money willingly. It is simplistic, as well as patronizing, to assume such an approach would imply that people are simply duped by clever and unscrupulous men. Clearly, people are making decisions to convert based on a real awareness of their needs and interests and feel that conversion serves them [30]

This is the mix feelings of joy and anxiety this paper expressed in the introduction concern the mushrooming of churches in Nigeria geo-political landscape in the contemporary history. However, the multiple African independent churches that dotted the Nigeria scenario have in no small measure assisted Nigeria and Nigerians in coping with the freezing socio-economic situation of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century and defined Nigeria as the most peaceful and enduring nation in the world. Imagine a Nigeria without this new wave of Christianity?

## 5. Conclusion

The African independent churches have taken root in Africa. By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the AICs had established themselves so firmly that they were no longer just protestant movements, but had started establishing themselves theological as genuine expressions of the Christian faith from an African perspective. They were against colonialism; and against missionary neglect of the social and psychological needs of the Africans. The Religious protest took different dimensions, but all were aimed at liberating the Africans from the evils of the white regime, from colonialism, socio-economic and demonic forces militating against the African identity and well beings (see Agha 2013:42). As already noted, the failure of the white missionaries was the source of protest against colonialism and the ardent desire for a new kind of spiritual guidance which gave rise to “African independent churches” (see Agha 2013:42). However, this desire for independency has continued even to this modern times, secessions and splits have occurred, excessive proliferation of churches has become worrisome as people keep departing from the bigger independent churches to form their own groups indiscriminately. Although independent churches have helped in the spread of the gospel and in winning of souls for Christ however, the emphasis on ‘prosperity sermons’ has blurred the demarcation between soul winning and materialism.

Nevertheless, this new wave of Christianity [AIC] has offered people in desperate situation a socio-psychological means of survival as they resort to these churches styled by critics as ‘instant miracle centers’ where they can find financial break through, healing, protection, fruit of the womb, marital break through etc. Now, we have come a long way in proving to the westerners that we are unique in our own ways, and can

promote Christianity in an African way, there is also need for us to lead an authentic Christian life, and not give room for doubts about our ability to maintain the Christian tradition in the African way. Just as the African Christian church fathers labored to make Christianity genuine and Africa, we are also meant to do away with grudges, materialism, indiscipline, impatience, hatred etc. that inspires secession. Prosperity sermons should be complimented with sermons of holy Christian living, honesty, humility and love for one another. The economic situation in the country has not grown better, it worsens by the day therefore the presence and relevance of these churches are of necessity in providing succor to desperate individuals and groups already hit by it.

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