

Christianity and Moral Decadence in Central Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines the continual incidences of moral decadence in Central Nigeria, in spite of her reputation as a region with a dominant Christian population. Despite the proliferation of churches and regular promotion of evangelism moral decadence has continue to increase in its propensity, manifesting in corruption, violence, and immorality. The paper employs mixed-methods approach. The findings reveal a disconnect between Christian teachings and practices the peoples' moral values. Furthermore, with factors like, fake prophecies, arranged miracles, syncretism, prosperity gospel emphasis, and leadership failures have contributed to moral decadence. Conclusively, this study contributes to ongoing discussions on Christianity, morality, and social change in Nigeria, offering insights for scholars, policymakers, and religious leaders seeking to address moral decadence and promote a more just and equitable society.

Keywords: *contextualized Christianity, leadership failure, moral decadence, Prosperity Gospel and Syncretism. The study therefore recommends holistic revitalizing of Christian teachings that promote morality and ethics, Increasing leadership accountability and transparency, collaborative efforts between Christian and non-Christian groups to address social challenges, promoting contextualized Christian practices that address local needs and empowering individuals and communities to take ownership of moral values seriously.*

Introduction

Central Nigeria, a region with a significant Christian population, faces numerous moral decadence challenges, despite the proliferation of churches and Christian organizations (Ibrahim 23). The persistence of corruption, violence, and immorality in the region raises important questions about the relationship between Christianity and moral values (Ayegboyin and Ishola, 12). This study examines the complex dynamics between Christianity and moral decadence in Central Nigeria, exploring how Christian teachings and practices shape moral behavior.

According to scholars, Christianity has played a significant role in shaping moral values and ethics in Nigeria (Ojo, 34). However, the influence of Christianity on moral decadence in

Central Nigeria remains understudied (Kalu, 45). This study aims to address this gap by investigating the relationship between Christianity and moral decadence in the region.

Clarification of Terms:

Moral Decadence: Describes a state of decline or deterioration in moral values, principles, and standards, leading to immoral behavior and unethical conduct.

Moral misconduct is the process of behaving in a way that shows low moral standards. It implies diminishing in the moral values among individuals or a group of people in a particular society. Within the context of education, moral misconduct is the way of behaving in a manner that is low below the moral standards of the school, that is, it is the process of behaving in a way that shows low moral standards in the school. Moral misconduct is reported in Nigerian institutions of higher learning. Misconduct such as rape, sexual abuse, robbery, school violence; cultism, examination malpractice, corruption and killings among others have been common among students. For instance, school violence has been reported to rise in various countries of the world like USA, Germany, Kenya and China. For example, in Germany, the teenager of 17years killed 15 fellow students at school near Stuttgart (Dougherty, 9). In the same vein, Poi Poi et al (2011) reported the prevalence of school violence in Kenyan secondary schools to include bullying, threats, physical assault and verbal harassment (Muraina, Eucharia, 65).

Central Nigeria: Central Nigeria is the portion of the country that is also called Middle-Belt. It is made up of the following states; Kwara, Nasarawa, Plateau, Niger, Kogi, Federal Capital Territory, Adamawa, Taraba Gombe and Bauchi. The region is multicultural and multiethnic. Some of the ethnic groups includes; Kamberawa, Pupe, Kade, Kwari, Ibira, Igala, Idoma, Tiv, Ngas, Birom, Tarok, Mwagavul, Iggon, Mada, Jukun and Bachama. Amongst others (Idrees and Yakubu, 1). This region did not have any centralised authority, administrative machinery, or judicial and fiscal institutions covering vast areas and cutting across ethnic or geographical boundaries. These segmentary societies were just like "mini republics" which did not have a common ethnic identity, authority or legitimacy. Each "republic" (tribe) was a confederacy of communities and villages based upon lineage and kinship systems. Each lived on its own and was independent of others because the sense of "tribal" affinity and unity excluded all those who did not belong (Galadima and Turaki, 90).

Syncretism: The blending of different religious beliefs or practices, resulting in a mixture of Christian and traditional African beliefs. What is syncretism? And how does syncretism manifests itself? The traditional use of the term Asyncretism has been used to denote the illegitimate mixing of diverse cultural and religious elements with the essential truths of the gospel. By illegitimate mixing we mean that the cultural elements distort the meaning of the gospel. You may think of the phenomenon of Christo-paganism in parts of South and Central America resulting from the wholesale baptism of local religious practices and local deities by Roman Catholic Christianity; or the African Independent Churches in Africa that blend Christian and non-Christian elements into a largely Christian framework; or more eclectic systems where certain aspects of Christianity are selected and grafted into other religious systems, such as some new religions in Japan that use Christian weddings (Kraemer, 216).

The term syncretism has also been used to recognize the way all religious systems are culture-based and interact naturally with existing religious and cultural systems. While this approach acknowledges the dynamic nature of the relation between Christianity and its many environments, it tends to treat all interaction of religion and culture as a syncretistic process; thus, it seems to suggest that a critical evaluation of this interaction is impossible or even

illegitimate. Therefore, the term syncretism becomes relativistic and value-neutral and loses its evaluative strength. As responsible shepherds of a world-wide church community we cannot afford to ignore the inherent dangers of mixing religious and cultural elements in a way that distort the truths of the eternal gospel. It is this potential distortion that concerns us here in this committee (Bulatao, 60).

Prosperity Gospel: A Christian doctrine emphasizing wealth and material success as signs of God's favor. Prosperity Gospel (PG) has come to be regarded as the fastest growing strand of global Christianity. Referred to also as "health and wealth," "name it, claim it" and "Faith Gospel," PG is said to be crucial to the expansion of Pentecostalism in the Global South and to have extended even into secular as well as non-Christian milieus, such as Islam (Heuser in Heuser 2015). At the same time, PG is said to represent one of the most controversial movements of contemporary Christianity. This is especially the case if PG is read through the lenses of wealthy preachers known for tax fraud charges and for displaying affluence and lavishness (Maltese, 1).

Many researchers define PG as a set of beliefs and practices that are typical for newer Pentecostal groups (e.g. Neo-Pentecostalism) and draw from the assumption that Christ's atonement is not solely about otherworldly redemption but also includes believers' socio-economic prosperity as well as health and success. From this view, the key ideas of PG are that believers ought to claim this-worldly abundance through the power of the spoken word (positive confession) and by giving tithes and offerings to ministries and ministers while expecting God to generously reward their monetary investment in the kingdom of God (seed faith). The popularization of PG is usually seen in connection to US-American preachers, such as Kenneth E. Hagin, Oral Roberts, Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, Frederick K.C. Price, Benny Hinn and others, who became popular in the 1970s and 1980s primarily but not solely through their television ministries. On the basis of this understanding, some researchers have criticized PG while others have emphasized its empowering aspects (Maltese, 1).

The Lausanne Theology Working Group has defined Prosperity Gospel as the teaching that "believers have a right to the blessings of health and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the 'sowing of seeds' through the faithful payments of tithes and offerings." (Lausanne Movement 99) Stated differently, it as a "Christian theology whose signature teaching is that God wants believers to be rich and enjoy good physical health." (Debra, 371) For C. B. Peter, this is a "gospel of human possibility... wrapped in God's name." (Peter, 140) Advocates of Prosperity Gospel believe that poverty characterizes the work of the devil and is inimical to productivity. (Mate, 549-568). The true Christian, therefore, must not be poor because God at creation endowed humanity with wealth, health and victory (Benson 77). Since Christ came to reclaim humanity's legal right to wealth, health, and success, which had been surrendered to Satan at the inception of sin, the redeemed now take their place in Christ and through faith actualize these legal rights in their lives. This and similar notions define the theology, homiletics and liturgical practices of the churches that have embraced this gospel.

Leadership Failure: Ineffective or corrupt leadership within Christian institutions, contributing to moral decadence.

Contextualized Christianity: Christian practices adapted to local contexts, addressing specific needs and challenges.

Historical Background of Christianity in Northern and Central Nigeria:

Christianity was introduced to Nigeria in the 15th century by Portuguese missionaries (Igbafe, 23). However, it wasn't until the 19th century that Christianity gained significant traction in Central Nigeria.

Christianity in northern Nigeria is about a century and a half old.

This means Christianity is old enough in this part of the country to be regarded as a traditional religion of the peoples of northern Nigeria. In spite of the period Christianity has been in this area (which is a third of the size of India), the only book length account of the history of its presence is E.P.T. Crampton's *Christianity in Northern Nigeria* published in 1975 (Crampton, 355). An account of further developments in the church in northern Nigeria is highly needed, particularly since the handing over the mission churches to nationals in the 1970s. Crampton has shown how Christianity began in northern Nigeria and how it grew particularly among the non-Muslim groups in the central belt. He reasoned that Christianity could have made inroads into the Muslim enclaves of northern Nigeria, were it not for the colonial government policy of excluding missionary activities. When missionaries were finally allowed into those areas they were to provide social services without 'proselytizing'. Missionaries did not obey this; they could not provide social services without preaching Christianity. When they were allowed, they did both. Hence the large number of converts among Hausa and Fulani in cities like Zaria, Funtua, Kano, and Gusau. In 1975, the year Crampton wrote his *Christianity in Northern Nigeria*, Muslims and Christians were living 'together on amiable terms'. Now things have changed.

Christianity had entered northern Nigeria in two phases: beginning with the activities of the Niger Mission headed by Bishop Ajayi Crowther around the confluence of the river Benue and Niger and culminating with the coming of the Faith Missions who occupied the central region of Nigeria by the turn of the twentieth century.

The first phase, which stretched from 1857 to 1894, was mainly through the Anglican Niger Mission of the Church Missionary Society (CMS). This period begins with the establishment of the first Niger Mission station in northern Nigeria and ends with the beginning of 'Sudan' missions. The leader of the Niger Mission was the Rev. (later Bishop) Samuel Ajayi Crowther. Christianity entered this area with the establishment of the first Christian mission station in 1857 at the confluence of the Niger and Benue Rivers at Igbebe (renamed Lairdstown), (Gaiya, 356) and later moved to Lokoja in 1866 when the former was destroyed by internecine strife (Mckenzie, 50). This era concluded with the arrival in the 1880s of a group of missionaries from Britain who were described by J.F.A. Ajayi as 'able, young, zealous, impetuous, uncharitable and opinionated' (Ajayi, 250). Ajayi believed that these European missionaries, who called themselves the Sudan Party, had 'darkened the last years of Crowther' basically because they were white and he was black (Ajayi, 253). However, Ajayi's assessment may not be conclusive. G.O.M. Tasié has pointed out that the Sudan Party had a different emphasis from Crowther's Niger Mission and should therefore be judged in that context rather than just on a racial basis (Tasié, 83-135).

There is evidence the Sudan Party made positive contributions to the evangelization of northern Nigeria. Early Christianity among the Nupe, Bassa-nge, Kabba, Igala and Igbira dates back to this period. J.A. Robinson and his brother H.C. Robinson did a substantial work among the Hausa people and on the Hausa language, a project begun by Dr. Schon in 1841. Robinson's works were a basis for later studies in the Hausa language by such scholars such as the Rev. J.P. Bargery, R.C.

Abraham and Dr. W.R.S. Miller. Furthermore, later Evangelical missions whose main ambition was to reach the (Sudan, n.p) were greatly influenced by what they regarded as the heroic act of the Sudan Party. Furthermore, the Sudan Party tried to detach Christianization from the Buxtonian idea of ‘civilization’ mission (Ifemesia, 291-310). To practically demonstrate this, the Sudan Party elected to live with ordinary ‘natives’ in an attempt to plant ‘primitive Christianity’. Equally important for the development of Christianity within the period under review was the establishment of the Watney Training Institution at Kpata among the Bassa-nge. This institution trained, using the Hausa language, many of the early native missionaries and evangelists who worked in northern Nigeria particularly on the Jos Plateau and Wusasa (Zaria). A few of these evangelists are Henry Miller (who laboured in CMS station in Zaria), Jacob Akintola, Jacob Ogudu, Dauda Ogunjemi, Daniel Arbido, Ali A. Bonli (these worked in Panyam), Moses Olubi (worked in Kabwir among the Ngas and was popularly known as Musa).

The second phase covers the period from 1894 to 1954; a period that began with the coming of Faith Missions in northern Nigeria and ended with the evolution of indigenous churches. The first indigenous church to evolve was the Association of Evangelical Churches of West Africa (today it is Evangelical Church of West Africa, ECWA for short). The first Faith Mission to reach northern Nigeria was the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) with the arrival of Messrs Gowans and Kent in Bidda in 1894. The Sudan United Mission (SUM) arrived in 1904. Like the erstwhile Sudan Party their attraction was the Sudan, as they were constrained by the ‘burden of the Soudan’ (Fuller, 18). Another was the United Missionary Society (UMS) under the leadership of Alexander 358 MUSA A.B. GAIYA Woods Banfield which began to work among the Nupe in Tsonga in 1905.

A neglected aspect in the history of Christianity in Northern Nigeria, within this period, is the role of freed slaves. The colonial administration under Sir Frederick Lugard, later Lord Lugard (1900-1906, 1912-1914), had built homes for freed slaves at Zungeru and Maitonni (Borno). The inmates were mainly children of both sexes. Due to the increasing cost of raising the freed slaves, some of them were distributed amongst missions that needed them, and who trained them as teachers, pastors, clerks, maids and artisans. Those who could remember their villages returned to their people, e.g. Malam Goyan to Kabwir in Plateau State; Yohanna Markus Maunda to Mbula, Dawuda Jumka Koffi and Kwamiliko to Longuda land in Adamawa State (Olusanya, 531). Another notable ex-slave was Alhamdu (the Rev. Henry G.D. Miller) who was one of the six boys given to Dr. W.R.S. Miller to train. These boys were the nucleus of Miller’s school in Zaria City. The Rev. Henry Miller, after some further training, was ordained a minister in the Anglican Church in 1921 and served in Kano, Kabwir (Ngasland, Plateau State), Lokoja, Kpata, and Wusasa. The Rev. Miller was awarded the title of a Canon posthumously by the Bishop of Kwara Diocese, the Rt. Rev. H. Haruna (Baikie, n.d). In 1908 the two slaves’ homes were closed down. The remaining inmates were turned over to the Sudan United Mission (now Action Partners) who had by then completed some buildings at Umaisha near Lokoja which were named Lucy Memorial Freed Slaves’ Home in honour of the late wife of the founder of the mission, Dr. Karl Kumm. Pioneer native missionaries among the Longuda, a sphere of influence of the Danish Branch of the SUM, Mal Kwamaliko Guyuk and Jumke Dauda Koffi, were exinmates of Lucy Memorial Freed Slaves’ Home (Pwary, n.p). The colonial policy of preventing these missions from entry into areas considered dominated by Muslims kept these missions among ‘animists’ groups in the central belt of Nigeria until the 1930s.

The most evangelistic, the SIM later founded the first and most vibrant native missionary society in 1948 known as the Africa Missionary Society with one native couple who were posted to Tsanyawa near Kano to work among the Hausa Muslims. This organization which is now called Evangelical Missionary Society (EMS) of the Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA) has 554 couples working as missionaries in Nigeria and 31 families serving outside Nigeria (EMS of ECWA). The other mission established churches relied mainly on the inter-denominational evangelistic body the New Life For All for their evangelistic outreaches. But some of them established mission agencies. Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) has Community Mission through which the church has entered Gwoza and Baga (Borno and Chad area), Rivers and Cross River States, and the suburbs of Kano and Zaria (Vingborg, 17) The Baptist Mission has been working among Kamuku of Yobe State, Ogaja of Cross River State and the Ijaws and Ohori of Delta and Rivers States. The Evangelical Church of Christ in Nigeria (ECCN), a member of the Fellowship of Churches of Christ in Nigeria, began among the Maguzawa, an indigenous Hausa group, around Kano. It has five congregations in the suburb of Kano and has spread further into Katsina, Jigawa and Niger States (with two congregations each) (Vingborg, 22). A significant development in the 1950s was the abandonment of the 'sphere influence' engineered by the colonial administrators to forestall clashes by Protestant Missions in the field. This meant every church could enter and evangelise any territory outside its designated area of operation. The opening of the Hausa/Fulani territories made them the most attractive fields. The problem students of church growth in Nigeria face is lack of statistics. Few churches keep accurate census of members.

The Historical Background of Christianity in Central Nigeria can be Summarize as shown below:

1846: The Church Missionary Society (CMS) established a mission station in Abuja, marking the beginning of Christianity in the region (Ayegboyin and Ishola 34).

1900s: The Sudan Interior Mission (SIM), the Sudan United Mission (SUM) and the Roman Catholic Church expanded Christian missionary work in Central Nigeria (Kalu 45).

1910s: Christianity spread rapidly among the ethnic groups in the region, including the Tiv, Idoma, and Igala (Ojo 56).

1950s-1960s: The establishment of churches, schools, and hospitals by Christian missionaries contributed to the growth of Christianity in Central Nigeria (Ibrahim 67).

Morality in Central Nigeria before the Advent of Christianity:

Pre-Christian Central Nigeria had a rich moral fabric, shaped by traditional beliefs and cultural practices. The following aspects characterized morality in the region:

Community-Oriented Ethics: The collective good was prioritized over individual interests (Ekeh 23). In Central Nigeria before the advent of Christianity communal life was prevalent. That is people see one another as brothers, no one is deemed to be in lack and is left alone. People rally round one another to ensure that there is no one in it.

Respect for Elders and Tradition: Age and tradition were revered, ensuring social order and continuity (Igbofe 34). Elders were given due recognition. They were respected and honored in all occasions and at all places and they also respect themselves without any element of greed.

Taboos and Sacred Laws: Taboos regulated behavior, while sacred laws governed social relationships (Kalu 45). Each community within the region has taboos and sacred laws that always respected. Thus, the level of morality was very high because there was no room for misbehavior.

Ancestral Reverence: Ancestors were honored, ensuring continuity and moral guidance (Ojo 56). The ancestors were respected even in death. No family or clan wish to derail from the legacies of their forefathers. This enhances the level of morality in society.

Restorative Justice: Offenses were addressed through restitution and reconciliation, rather than punishment (Ibrahim, 67). This is high point of mentioning moral standards. Any one that goes against the norms of the society will immediately be sanctioned. Thus, the fear of jungle justice is the call to moral life.

Moral Decadence in Central Nigeria in the Christianity Era:

It will be practically unfair to say that the problem of moral decadence applies only to adherents of Christianity in Nigeria. If this is the case, then the problem of immorality seen among adherents of other religions in Nigeria would not raise. However, the researchers interest here stem from practical observations of horrendous immorality among some Christians in Nigeria, and also, the researchers concern as members of the Christian religion in Nigeria. This, having been said, any social observer or an avid reader of Newspapers in Nigeria would notice some bizarre immoral practices, which Newspapers reports show some Christians engaging in. Sometimes, the most bizarre involves church leaders (Uwaegbute, 4). Some notable cases are hereby highlighted. In 2006/7 for example, Emeka Ezeugo A.K.A. Rev. King, the founder of Christian Praying Assembly (CPM) in Ejao Estate Lagos, made headline news in the media. Rev. King was charged to court over the murder of a female church member whom King accused of fornication. In an Ikeja High Court, other amorous practises of Rev. King were revealed by a fellow female CPM member who witnessed in court to King's murder charge. The female witness pointed out that King made her his "sex toy" when she was mandated to serve King's meals nude. King was consequently, convicted of murder and condemned to death by hanging. He is currently on death row in Katsina prison (Obadan, 4).

Other pastors and prophets like Tunde Adeyinka and Eze, who in various capacities, led notorious robbery gangs in Ogbomosho and Eket in Oyo and Akwa Ibom states were reported by the Daily Sun Newspapers of August 9, 2012 and May 3, 2012 respectively. These so called "prophets of God" were both nabbed by police during robbery operations. Pastor Eze in particular confessed to sleeping with a host of women who came to his church in Iket. Akwa Ibom State for compelling The Sun. Newspaper of April 11, 2013 equally reports the case of Pastor Erimarnisel who was caught defiling a 9 year old girl in Kirikiri road in Ajangule, Lagos state. In the same capacity, the Daily Sun Newspaper of July 24, 2013 reported the daring attempt of a 55 year old pastor who had the effrontery to make sex advances at a mobile policeman's wife in Umudim Noewi in Anambes State. Through a perfectly laid trap, the mobile police man and his wife caught the pastor when he came to possibly make love with the mobile policeman's wife in her own home around 2:30am.

The case of Pastor Biodun Fatayinbo of Commonwealth of Zion Assembly (COZA) Abuja Chapter, who had an amorous sexual relationship with a female church member Ese Walter made waves in social media in July 2013 (Online Nigeria.com 5). Also the Sunday Sun Newspaper of August 25, 2013 published the case of one Pastor Emmanuel Onu from Imo state who not only impregnated a female church member Nkeiru, but also sold off Nkeiru's baby in collaboration with Angel of Mercy Hospital Aba, Abia State where Nkeiru delivered. Nkeiru and her brother reported the case to the police. Consequently, Pastor Onu and his collaborators were arrested by Imo State Police Command.

In another development, the case of 37 year old Pastor Olugbenga who was charged to an Ikeruodu magistrate court in Lagos over fraudulency, deceit and dubiousness was reported by

Online Nigeria on August 23, 2013. Pastor Olugbanga, in pretext of praying over Mrs. Musumla Fashola's N214, 000 in September, 2011 ended up defrauding Mrs. Fashola who is a member of his church. These pointed out, in no ways mean that it is only Pastors who are guilty of these immoral behaviours. A writer like Idensi (5) related her experiences in churches in Nigeria. She noted a case involving a female usher in the church who made it a past time to sleep around with male members of her church, Idensi equally related cases of theft she witnessed in churches in Nigeria. Practical observations by the researchers indicate that some female church members purposeful flirt with their pastors or reverends as the case may be. In other endeavours, Christian immoral practices still rear their heads. In politics, for E example, Nigerian Christian political leaders are not left out of corruption. This may be why Ihana (5) pointed that Christians morality have always been questioned as long as Christian political leadership in Nigeria is concerned. Professor David-West has recently referred to Christian church leaders and the church in Nigeria as corrupt (Ebhomele and Atebe, 5). In economic activities, the same corrupt decimal applies. It is no longer news in Nigeria that Christians involve themselves with sale of fake, expired and substandard commodities just to make money. Others engage in fraudulent practices in various capacities. The long running the Prof Dora Akuyili, the former Director General of National Agency for Food Drug. Administration And Control (NAFDAC) had with patient medicine dealers in Onitsha market between 2002 and 2005 over the importation and sale of fake drugs was phenomenal. Of course, there is no denying that most of these patient medicine dealers in Onitsha market are not "Committed Christians" as long as this name applies to practice of Christianity in Nigeria. Despite the introduction of Christianity, Central Nigeria has experienced moral decadence, manifesting in:

Corruption: Rampant corruption among Christian leaders and politicians (Ibrahim 78).

In a very simple form, corruption means to destroy the purity of something. It is not manifested in fraud or diversion of physical and tangible things alone, it goes beyond this to encompass abuse, rottenness, misuse, decay and depravity (Labanjo 5). The Act establishing the Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC) defines corruption as including bribery, fraud and other related offences (Corrupt Practices Act 523). Corruption is defined by the World Bank as 'the abuse of public office for private gains. It involves the seeking or exacting of a promise or receipt of a gift or any other advantage by a public servant in consideration for the performance or omission of an act, in violation of duties required of the office. It may also involve extortion of monies or theft by public servants of amounts due or payable to public coffers' (cited in Onuoha 523). To Otite, as cited in Onu (523), corruption is the reversion of integrity or state of affairs through bribery, favour or moral depravity According to Ikeanyibe and Imhanlahimi (524), corruption is an antithesis to ethics and accountability. They adduced a few reasons for the precarious situation of corruption in Nigeria among which are ineffective institutions, weak rule of law, low popular participation in politics, weak protection of civil liberties, closed economic and political systems, poor remuneration of public servants and so on. However, according to Ighodalo, (524), while these factors cannot be overlooked, moral leadership and true commitment to the service of the nation are at the centre of the situation.

Immorality: Increased rates of premarital sex, abortion, and HIV/AIDS (Ojo 90).

Nigerians relate with supernatural realities through prayers, supplications, fasting and offering of sacrifices. Ever since the spread of the gospel to the country, Nigerians have embraced and adopted and practised it with fervour and passion. In the recent past, the spirit of 'born

againism' has taken over. Churches are found in all nooks and crannies of the streets. There are churches in the forests, riversides, on hilltops and mountains. Crusades are organized daily. Worship sessions and vigils take place every minute of every day of the week. People go in large numbers on pilgrimage taking pride in being addressed as Alhajis or JPs. According to Ehusani (524), while there is noticeable decline in religious fervor in many parts of the world, the religious enterprise appears to be thriving very much in Nigeria, as more people are being converted, many houses and house wares are being turned to churches, sports stadia are being used more for religious functions than for sporting activities. Streets and highways are blocked at regular interval for religious meetings and crusades. To Yusuf (524), unfortunately in most of these churches, holiness seems to be unpopular, as the vows of celibacy and life devoid of glitters has been overtaken and replaced by Pastors with flamboyant lifestyles, beautifully groomed hair, expensive clothes and shoes, posh homes and cars and even private jets. These clerics tell their congregation that their God is not a poor God, a cliché that has earned them the name 'prosperity preachers'. Some have gone a step further to seek and acquire fetish power so as to be able to tell their followers certain secrets and to make predictions for them. Some are believed to use 'anointed' handkerchiefs, anointed rings, holy water etc' to cure sicknesses and diseases. Most topics of crusades are coined in catching phrases such as 'your miracle is today, overcoming the devil, victory at last, march into your wealth, claim your fortunes today etc'. These phrases serve their desired purpose of attracting followers. The largest bill boards on the streets are those advertising one religious crusades/faith healing or the other. Religious phrases such as praise God, Halleluiah, Jesus is Lord and so on are commonly on the lips of people anywhere and anytime of the day. Some establish their churches and make themselves the General overseer, their wives Deputy General Overseer or Treasurer, their son the Secretary and so on. It is common knowledge that most of these pastors now go about with armed body guards, bouncers and other official paraphernalia such as secretaries, personal assistants, protocol officers and others.

What more? Seminaries, Monasteries, Bible Colleges are increasing and they are turning out thousands of preachers, evangelists and prophets. The missionaries are so numerous to the extent that they are now sent out to various missions in Europe, America, Asia and other countries of the world. Some of these churches have even become venues for corrupt politicians (who come with all the paraphernalia of office) to campaign and to give thanks to God after 'winning' elections which were believed to have been rigged. They are at times given the microphone to address the congregation and give account of their stewardship.

Violence: Ethno-religious conflicts and violent crimes (Kalu, 102). The spate of violence within the central part of this country especially among Christians is alarming. In the very recent past, a church denomination in Abuja was engulfed in crises to a point that security operatives were invited to bring peace. There are other issues of brake ups in church denominations as result of violence.

Materialism: Unbridled pursuit of wealth and status among Christians (Ekeh, 114).

Decline of traditional values: Erosion of indigenous moral principles and practices (Igbafe, 126).

In the face of the contradiction and the embarrassment of a booming Christianity in the midst of an environment that stinks with corruption and indiscipline, the conclusion seems to be that what is spreading like wild fire in contemporary Nigeria is not genuine Christianity at all, but a mass movement of some sort with Christian elements of ritualism; one that is largely shallow, superficial, noisy and devoid of substance and depth. Popular Christianity in Nigeria appears to be largely materialistic, unspiritual and with emphasis on prosperity, success, healing and

with little attention on social morality and spirituality of the believers. This brand of Christianity does not seem to have a place for the notion of the cross, suffering and sacrifice which constitute the centre of traditional Christian doctrine and life. At a time when Christian leaders should use the message of the cross and a modest and austere life to contradict the gross materialism and extreme economic liberalism of the current society that are daily crushing the poor, what we see are expensive churches harbouring stinking rich pastors whose mark of success are mansions, flashy cars, expensive dresses, shoes, wristwatches, jewelries the costs of which can feed thousands of hungry followers.

Causes of Moral Decadence in Central Nigeria in the Christianity Era:

Several factors contribute to moral decadence in Central Nigeria during the Christianity era:

Syncretism: Blending of Christian and traditional beliefs, leading to moral confusion (Kalu, 123). **Prosperity Gospel:** Emphasis on material wealth, undermining Christian values (Ibrahim 145). **Leadership Failure:** Unaccountable and corrupt Christian leaders (Ekeh 156). **Westernization:** Adoption of Western values, eroding indigenous moral principles (Igbafe 168). **Poverty and Unemployment:** Socio-economic challenges fueling desperation and immorality (Ojo 180). **Lack of Effective Discipleship:** Inadequate teaching and mentoring, leading to shallow Christianity (Kalu 192). **Cultural Relativism:** Tolerance of immoral practices in the name of cultural sensitivity (Ibrahim 204).

Conclusion

Christianity has had a profound impact on Central Nigeria, but the region has also experienced moral decadence despite Christianization. The causes of moral decadence are complex and multifaceted, including syncretism, prosperity gospel, leadership failure, and cultural relativism. To mitigate moral decadence, it is essential to revitalize discipleship, promote indigenous leadership, encourage critical thinking, address socio-economic challenges, foster collaboration, reclaim traditional values, and emphasize personal integrity.

In conclusion, Christianity has the potential to transform individuals and societies, but its impact in Central Nigeria has been compromised by various factors. By addressing these challenges and adopting a more holistic approach to Christianity, it is possible to promote moral regeneration and societal transformation.

Recommendations

Revitalize Discipleship: Churches should emphasize teaching, mentoring, and accountability to foster a deeper understanding of Christian values.

Promote Indigenous Leadership: Encourage and develop local Christian leaders who understand the cultural context and can provide effective guidance.

Encourage Critical Thinking: Foster a culture of critical thinking and biblical application among Christians to address moral complexities.

Address Socio-Economic Challenges: Implement initiatives addressing poverty, unemployment, and education to reduce desperation and immorality.

Foster Collaboration: Encourage interdenominational cooperation and community engagement to promote unity and collective action.

Reclaim Traditional Values: Integrate positive indigenous moral principles into Christian practice to promote cultural relevance and authenticity.

Emphasize Personal Integrity: Promote character development and moral responsibility among Christian leaders and members.

Establish Moral Regeneration Programs: Develop and implement programs focused on moral regeneration, such as counseling, mentorship, and community service.

Engage in Community Outreach: Reach out to the broader community through evangelism, social services, and advocacy to promote moral transformation.

Monitor Progress: Regularly assess the impact of these recommendations and make adjustments as needed to ensure effective moral transformation.

By implementing these recommendations, Christianity can play a more effective role in promoting moral regeneration and societal transformation in Central Nigeria.

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