

From Pulpit to Profit: The Entrepreneurial Spirit of Pentecostalism in Abuja, Nigeria

Joseph Esther Ojone (PhD)

Department of Religious Studies, Kogi State University, Anyigba

Abstract: This study explores the connection of religion and entrepreneurship in Abuja, Nigeria focusing on the Pentecostal movement. Studies on Pentecostalism have been approached from several ideologies. This paper focuses on how Pentecostalism has evolved from a purely religious phenomenon to a significant economic force driven by entrepreneurial religion. The study uncovers various ways in which mega pastors embraced entrepreneurship, turning religious beliefs into profitable ventures. The paper draws on qualitative data from in-depth interviews with key informants and focus group discussions. This study will combine historical, descriptive and analytical methods of data collection and analysis. Also, primary and secondary sources of data will be used for the study. Primary data will be generated through interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with some of the mega pastors, their members and theological scholars. Secondary data will be sourced from relevant journals, published books, magazines, newspapers. Interviews with local religious leaders, community members, and scholars in Abuja. Media content analysis of prominent religious programs and publications will be carefully analyzed. This study is particularly significant as it contributes to previous research on religion and entrepreneurship while espousing Pentecostalism's leverage on Entrepreneurship to drive economic development, social transformation and innovation in Abuja, Nigeria.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Religion, Pentecostalism, Mega Pastors, Abuja, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The rise of entrepreneurial religions, particularly within the Pentecostal movement, has become a notable phenomenon in Abuja. This trend has sparked scholarly interest in understanding the religious beliefs, entrepreneurial activities, and the proliferation of mega-pastors within the region. Pentecostal movement in Abuja, the federal capital territory of Nigeria has taken unusual albeit strange dimensions. There is the proliferation of Pentecostal churches anchored upon miracles, visions and stupendous prosperity mainly of church founders and their associate ministers. With the use of social media and new information and communication technologies, they preach and reach out to a wider audience on their supernatural powers to heal, lift family and ancestral curses, promote and sustain success in ones chosen career, cast out demons and evil spirits responsible for the poverty of members upon payment of certain amount of money and rituals. They

also perform live signs, wonders and miracles to the awe of the uninitiated. The new trend in Pentecostal movements in Abuja has equally seen the mass migration of pastors with powers to perform signs, miracles and wonder from smaller rural towns to Abuja, where many have settled and established their headquarters. Common strategy of winning 'souls' or membership are often based on the ability to prophesy and perform miracles backed upon by signs and wonders often manifesting in the form of live dramaturge of evil spirit cum satanic manifestations leaving a new holy spirit filled soul. Most of the mega pastors in Abuja live in stupendous affluence, driving exotic cars and many with private jets and universities while their members wallow in abject poverty. They claim to have power to anoint politicians to win elections and also organize special prayers and fasting for members or rich individuals who want political appointments and promotions in their places of work. The strange problematic is that anointed materials are excessively expensive and special miracles and

healings are for sale. They charge consultancy fees from members and nonmembers who want to see the “Man of God.” In many Pentecostal churches in Abuja, which the author has visited, the prices vary from tens of thousands of Naira to millions of Naira, depending on the kind of services required of the Pastor. Some of the services include personal deliverance from curses and witchcraft manipulation, family deliverance, community deliverance, business deliverance, anointing oil and water for electoral victory, deliverance from joblessness, my Visa success oil, marital freedom and fruits of the womb oil. The rise of Pentecostalism in Abuja has been accompanied by the emergence of entrepreneurial religions and mega pastors who preach the gospel of prosperity, miracles, and money. This paper examines the Entrepreneurial spirit of Pentecostalism in Abuja, the Federal Capital of Nigeria. The city of Abuja is the eighth most populous city in Nigeria.¹ The indigenous inhabitants of Abuja are the Gwandara, Gbagyi (Gwari), having the majority of population in the region. Other groups in the area include the Bassa, Gade, Dibo, Egburra, Nupe and Koro.²

The Rise of Pentecostalism in Abuja

Pentecostalism derives from the Greek word “Pentecostal” which means the fiftieth day.³ It is a form of Christianity that emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and the importance of spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues and healing. Pentecostalism in contemporary parlance applies to a Charismatic phenomenon which puts its emphasis on the visible gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially the gifts of tongues and faith healing.⁴ Explicitly, Ukeh defines it as that movement within Christianity, which emphasizes personal relationship with the Holy Spirit as the mainstay of authentic Christianity.⁵ Many Pentecostal churches in Nigeria also promote the prosperity gospel, which teaches that God wants believers to be wealthy and successful in all

areas of life. The rise of Pentecostalism in Abuja, as in other parts of Nigeria, can be attributed to a variety of factors. McCauley⁶ and Rotimi⁷ both highlight the role of Pentecostalism in providing social services and a sense of hope in the face of poverty and economic challenges. This is particularly relevant in the context of Abuja, which has experienced rapid urbanization and a growing population. Obadare⁸ further suggests that the rise of Pentecostalism has triggered a response in the form of a charismatic Islam, indicating a complex interplay between religious movements in the region. These studies collectively point to the diverse nature of the rise of Pentecostalism in Abuja, reflecting both local and global influences.

Pentecostalism in Abuja is associated with the prosperity gospel, miracles, and money. The prosperity gospel is the belief that God rewards faith with material wealth, and it has been linked to corruption and inequality in Nigeria.⁹ Pentecostalism in Nigeria has been described as the fastest-growing commercial industry, with some churches having more than 5,000 people feeding the pastor. The prosperity gospel has also been criticized for promoting the quest for wealth over spiritual growth.¹⁰ Miracle services are a common feature of Pentecostalism in Nigeria, with pastors claiming to heal the sick and perform other miracles.¹¹ However, there have been reports of pastors using these services to defraud their followers.¹² Money is also a significant aspect of Pentecostalism in Nigeria, with some pastors encouraging their followers to donate large sums of money to the church.¹³

Pentecostalism has played a significant role in the rise of entrepreneurial religions in Abuja. The growth of Pentecostalism in Nigeria has led to the emergence of mega churches and the rise of Pentecostapreneurship, which is the use of entrepreneurial strategies to promote the growth of Pentecostalism and achieve economic success.¹⁴ Pentecostal

¹ “Abuja Geography, Development and Population.” Britannica <https://www.britannica.com/place/Abuja-national-capital-Nigeria>. Retrieved 14th April, 2022. 11, December, 2023

² “Abuja-Wikipedia” <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abuja>. 11, December, 2023

³ J. Boyd *Bible Dictionary* (New York: Holman Bible Publishers, 1980), 219

⁴ Ikenga. Oraegbunam, “Meeting the Challenges of Pentecostalism in the Seminary Formation” in A. Nnamani, *The New Religious Movements: Pentecostalism in Perspective, Theological Association of Nigeria CATHAN* (2007):91

⁵ O. Ukeh, *Pentecostalism: The New Christianity?* (Enugu, Snaap Press Ltd, 2003), 15.

⁶ John, F. McCauley. “Africa’s New Big Man Rule? Pentecostalism and Patronage in Ghana” *African Affairs* 112.446 (December, 2013):18 DOI:10.1093/AFRAF/ADS072

⁷ Nkechi, C. Rotimi, Kanayo, L. Nwadior and Alex, A. Ugwuja. “Nigerian Pentecostal Churches and Their Prosperity Messages: A Safeguard against Poverty in Nigeria? 1980-2014” *Mgbakoigba, Journal of African Studies* 5.2 (June, 2016):16

⁸ Ebenezer Obadare. “The Muslim Response to the Pentecostal Surge in Nigeria: Prayer and the Rise of Charismatic Islam” *Journal of Religious and Political Practice* 2.1 (2016):78 DOI: 10.1080/20566093.2016.1085240

⁹ Daniel Jordan Smith. “The Pentecostal Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria: Paradoxes of Corruption and Inequality” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 59.1 (March, 2021):103-122 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022278x22278x2000066x>

¹⁰ Yinka Olomjobi. *Pentecostalism and the Gospel of the Belly in Nigeria* (Ibadan: John Archers, 2021), <https://rhbooks.com.ng/product/pentecostalism-and-the-gospel-of-the-belly-in-nigeria/>

¹¹ Rotimi Williams Omotoye. “A Critical Examination of the Activities of Pentecostal Churches in National Development in Nigeria” *Centro Studi Sulle Nuove Religioni* <https://www.cesnur.org/2010/omotoye.htm>

¹² Obadare, Ebenezer. “Raising Righteous Billionaires”: The Prosperity Gospel Reconsidered.” (HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies 72.4, (October, 2016): 1-8. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i4.3571>

¹³ Rotimi Williams Omotoye. “A Critical Examination of the Activities of Pentecostal Churches in National Development in Nigeria” (Centro Studi Sulle Nuove Religioni) <https://www.cesnur.org/2010/omotoye.htm>

¹⁴ Ngozi N. Iheanacho and Chidiebere A. Ughaerumba. “The Rising Paradigm of Pentecostapreneurship in Nigeria Impacts on National Development” *Open Journal of Philosophy* 6, (August, 2016): 288 <https://www.scirp.org/journal/paperinformation.aspx?paperid=70217>

churches in Abuja engage in activities such as building entrepreneurial skills, running clinics and schools, and promoting the prosperity gospel, which promises financial success to members.¹⁵ The beneficiaries of these activities are both members and non-members of the churches. The Pentecostal prosperity gospel has found a huge following in Nigeria, ostensibly because of the level of poverty in the country.¹⁶

Entrepreneurial Aspects of Religious Practice

The entrepreneurial model is one of the cult formations of religion. In this sense, founders of religions act like entrepreneurs, developing new products (religions) to sell to consumers (to convert people to). According to this model, most founders of new religions already have experience in several religious groups before they begin their own. They take ideas from the pre-existing religions, and try to improve on them to make them more popular. The theory of religious economy sees different religious organizations competing for followers in a religious economy, much like the way businesses compete for consumers in a commercial economy. Theorists assert that a true religious economy is the result of religious pluralism, giving the population a wider variety of choices in religion. Therefore, what a religious consumer searches for 'is a sense of hope, a sense of satisfaction, perhaps even nirvana.'¹⁷ Driven by this model, religious organizations market religion using God as their main product for specific reasons in the public space most especially in the Nigerian society. The theology of the marketing of religion refers to the process by which religious beliefs, practices, and ideologies are integrated with marketing strategies and techniques to promote and enhance the visibility, appeal, and success of a religious organization, its teachings, and its products or services. This phenomenon involves a complex interplay between religious and marketing elements, often blurring the lines between sacred and secular, spiritual and material.¹⁸

Entrepreneurial religions which refers to the processes of discovery, enactment, evaluation, and exploitation of

opportunities to create future goods and services motivated by the cultural and ideological beliefs, practices, and/or outcomes rooted in religious faith.¹⁹

A range of studies have explored the entrepreneurial behaviour of pastors and the commercial exploitation of Pentecostalism in various African countries. Corrêa²⁰ and Bassey²¹ both found that pastors in Brazil and Nigeria, respectively, exhibit entrepreneurial behavior in developing their churches, with the latter also noting a significant relationship between the teaching of Christian prosperity doctrine and the establishment of business ventures. Witte²² and Agyeman²³ focused on the intertwinement of commercial media and Pentecostalism in Ghana, with the latter highlighting the role of Pentecostalism in stimulating entrepreneurial spirit and innovation. The modernizing tendencies fostered within the informal economy by popular religious revivalism are being stunted by the relentless pressures of liberalization, globalization, and pseudo-democratization. These studies collectively suggest a strong link between religion, particularly Pentecostalism, and entrepreneurial activities in various African contexts.

Religion has become a product; products have become religious. Hence, marketing religion is about the target audience and packaging religious products. Consumers see religious products as a means of expressing their faith while merchandisers see products – including religious practice itself – as a means to spread the faith.²⁴ Thus, it is impossible in today's religious marketplace to separate religion from religious products because they have become so intertwined.²⁵ That is why religious bodies saw the idea in marketing and turned their resources toward advertising God in different forms of products – books, music, CDs, DVDs, anointing oil, calendars, holy water, handkerchief, etc. Furthermore, these religious products can be purchased online and payments can also be made online. Online streams of sermons and messages can be watched and an update announcement will be uploaded. As a pay-as-you go method, church members can pay their tithes and offerings through a custom-made Unstructured

¹⁵ Monday Adah Ogbe. "The Role of Pentecostalism in Human Development: A Study of Pentecostal Churches in Kubwa, Abuja, Nigeria" (M.A. Thesis, Saint Mary University, 2019), 266

¹⁶ Daniel Jordan Smith, 109

¹⁷ Einstein, Mara. *Brands of Faith: Marketing Religion in a Commercial Age*. (USA: Routledge, 2008), 37.

¹⁸ Oluwaseun O. Afolabi, Solomon Ayantayo Ojo and Oderinde Peter Ayoola. "Commodification of God in religion: Marketing Pentecostalism' in the Nigerian Public Space" *Journal of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity* (Nov 2023):1-2 1 DOI: 10.1080/27691616.2023.2279324.1

¹⁹ Discussion: View Thread <https://str.aom.org/discussion/call-for-papers-for-special-issue-on-the-emerging-subfield-of-religious-entrepreneurship-in-entrepreneurship-regional-development>

²⁰ Victor, S. Correa, Glauca, M. Vasconcellos and Marina de Almeida Cruz. "Entrepreneurial Orientation and Religion: The Pastor as an Entrepreneur" *Revista de Administracao, RAUSP Management Journal* 52 (May, 2017):331. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.rausp.2016.1..005> www.sciencedirect.com

²¹ Antigha O. Bassey, Joseph, O. Charles and Takim, A. Ojua. "Christian Prosperity Doctrine and Entrepreneurial Development of Nigeria: A Study of Selected Churches in Calabar, Nigeria" *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 5.9 (May, 2014):564 <https://www.richtmann.org/journal/index.php/mjss/article/view/2673> DOI:10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n9p564

²² Witte, Marleen de. "Business of the Spirit: Ghanaian Broadcast Media and the Commercial Exploitation of Pentecostalism." *Journal of African Media Studies* 3.2 (2011): 189

²³ Edmond A. Agyeman and Emmanuel Carsmer. "Pentecostalism and the Spirit of Entrepreneurship in Ghana: The Case of Maame Sarah Prayer Camp in Ghana." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 36.3 (2018):303-318 DOI: 10.1080/02589001.2018.1502416

²⁴ Hendershot Heather. *Shaking the World for Jesus: Media and Conservative Evangelical Culture*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004)

²⁵ Einstein, Brands of Faith, 37.

Supplementary Service Data (USSD) or a protected quick code. Invariably, techno-evangelization marketing strategy has been the latest method in reaching people in this religious globalized setting.²⁶

The Influence of Mega Pastors and Pentecostalism on Abuja's Socioeconomic Terrain

The rise of Pentecostalism in Abuja has transformed the scenery of religious leadership, emphasizing a blend of spirituality, entrepreneurship, media savvy, and societal influence in the trajectory of becoming a mega pastor. These mega churches in Abuja are known for their large congregations, modern infrastructure, and influence in the local community. They stress outreach and growth through sophisticated marketing, have a "consumer" orientation toward members, and stress the services to be provided to members. They also tend to grow quickly and under the leadership of a single senior pastor. Mega churches use market research to probe prospective members in a given catchment area for insight into their needs and use small groups to address those needs and interests. They often host various events, including worship services, conferences, and community outreach programs.

Mega churches produce goods and services that many urban dwellers consider desirable, such as entrepreneurial skills, clinics, and schools.²⁷ Depending on the goods and services produced, mega churches can be divided into four types: prosperity, healing and deliverance, personal empowerment and apostolic teaching, and prophetic-healing.²⁸ However, some Nigerians view prosperity churches as profit-making enterprises for their leaders and religious cover for corruption and inequality.²⁹ Mega pastors are politically powerful and respected by middle-class urbanized Nigerians. They own universities, jets, and fancy cars, and are sole proprietors of business outfits. While mega churches have built impressive religio-economic corporations, they lack the culture that inculcates democratic values in their members, making them

unsuitable spaces for members' training for citizenship rights, political responsibilities, and obligations. Some critics argue that the mega pastors use their religious influence as a cover for their political and economic activities. This can make it difficult for the government and regulators to hold them accountable for their actions.³⁰

Mega pastors in Abuja, Nigeria, are often associated with prosperity, political power, and large congregations. These pastors are typically from Pentecostal churches, which have been growing in Nigeria since the early 1990s. They are known for their wealth, owning private jets, and maintaining luxury cars and homes.³¹ The churches they lead are often mega churches, which are characterized by very large memberships, offering a variety of educational and social activities.³² The prosperity gospel is also prevalent among these pastors, emphasizing the importance of faith and positive confession in achieving financial success and physical well-being.³³ The prosperity gospel preached by mega pastors has been criticized for exploiting the poor and promoting wealth accumulation. Critics argue that while the pastors become richer, their members remain poorer, leading to a widening gap between the rich and the poor.³⁴ These characteristics have contributed to the significant influence of mega pastors in Abuja and across Nigeria. This paper argues that Pentecostalism and mega pastors have a significant impact on the socioeconomic and political landscape of Abuja.

Mega-churches in Nigeria practice the prosperity gospel, promising spiritual salvation and improved social and economic circumstances to their followers.³⁵ This gospel has been criticized for its similarity to Ponzi schemes and for contributing to the impoverishment of church members. Mega churches in Africa have been accused of capitalizing on belief and thriving from a failed government, becoming significant economic players in countries like Nigeria, Uganda, and Ghana.³⁶ The exact extent of their contribution to these countries' economies remains unclear. There also exist blurry lines between churches and businesses: Churches are not taxed, but figuring out where churches end and their businesses begin

²⁶ Oluwaseun O. Afolabi, Solomon Ayantayo Ojo and Oderinde Peter Ayoola, 7

²⁷ Nduka Orjinmo. "Enoch Adebayo Sexism Row: Why the Nigerian Pastor is so Popular" (www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-53488921).amp. 16, December, 2023

²⁸ Asonzeh Ukah. "Sacred Surplus and Pentecostal Too Muchness: The Salvation Economy of African Megachurches" *Handbook of Megachurches*, (2020):326 <https://brill.com/display/book/edcoll/9789004412927/BP000019.xml>

²⁹ Daniel Jordan Smith, 109

³⁰ Samuel Oakford. "Pentecostal Pastors in Nigeria are Rolling in Money and Political Power" (*Vice News*, October, 17, 2023) <https://www.vice.com/en/article/yw4jvg/pentecostal-pastors-in-nigeria-are-rolling-in-money-and-political-power>. 14, December, 2023

³¹ Ruth Maclean and Eromo Egbejule "Gospel glamour: how Nigeria's pastors wield political power Nigeria" *The Guardian* (13 February, 2019)

<https://amp.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/13/gospel-glamour-how-nigerias-pastors-wield-political-power> 14, December, 2023

³² "Megachurch - Wikipedia" <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Megachurch>. 14, December, 2023

³³ Daniel Jordan Smith, 109

³⁴ "Nigerian megachurches practise the prosperity they preach" <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2021/09/23/nigerian-megachurches-practise-the-prosperity-they-preach>. 14, December, 2023

³⁵ "Nigerian megachurches practise the prosperity they preach" <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2021/09/23/nigerian-megachurches-practise-the-prosperity-they-preach>. 14, December, 2023

³⁶ Shira Jeczimien. "The Hidden Economy of Africa's Fast Growing Mega Churches" *Editor's Picks: Fair Planet* (September, 2017). <https://www.fairplanet.org/editors-pick/the-hidden-economy-of-africas-fast-growing-megachurches/> 16, December, 2023

is not easy.³⁷ This blurry distinction can lead to criticisms of the churches' practices and their impact on society. Mega churches in Abuja generate revenue through various means, including tithes, businesses, and investments. Tithes, which typically constitute around 10% of members' income, are a significant source of revenue for these churches.³⁸ Some mega churches have diversified into businesses, such as owning universities, and investing in shares and properties. Some of the churches can hold more than 200,000 worshippers and with their attendant business empires, they constitute a significant section of the economy.³⁹

The businesses associated with the churches, including schools and other ventures, contribute to their revenue streams. However, the exact financial details of these churches are often not transparent, making it difficult to assess the full extent of their economic impact.⁴⁰ Furthermore, there have been reports that some pastors within these mega churches are paid relatively low salaries, while the churches themselves amass significant wealth.⁴¹ This suggests that revenue generation and financial practices within mega churches can be complex and multifaceted. The economic impact of mega-churches in Abuja is multifaceted, with both positive and negative aspects. While they contribute to the economy and provide social services, they have also been criticized for their practices and the potential negative effects on their followers' financial well-being.

Many mega pastors in Abuja also align with prosperity theology, emphasizing financial prosperity as a sign of God's favour. They teach principles of sowing seeds (often monetary), faith-based giving, and divine financial blessings. The role of mega pastors in these movements involves not only spiritual leadership but also social and economic influence. They often promote the prosperity gospel, which emphasizes material wealth and success as signs of God's favour, and this teaching can have implications for the socio-economic dynamics of the region.⁴² Mega pastors and Pentecostal churches are also involved in various activities aimed at human development, such as building entrepreneurial skills, running clinics and schools, and providing social services to both members and non-members.

Mega pastors employ aggressive church growth strategies, such as organizing massive crusades, conferences, and outreach programs. They focus on attracting and retaining members through engaging programs and impactful ministries. Some mega pastors in Abuja demonstrate strong business acumen. They establish businesses or enterprises linked to the church, creating streams of income that contribute to the church's financial growth. Successful mega pastors often have significant social influence and connections, including relationships with political figures. They use this influence to advance causes, gain support, and sometimes even influence political decisions.

The Entrepreneurial Spirit of Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism's relationship with money, power, and miracles is a complex and evolving one. Theron⁴³ notes the movement's growth and increasing financial influence, particularly in South Africa. Meyer⁴⁴ explores the intertwining of politics, occult forces, and Pentecostalism in Ghana, where the movement is seen as a force for revealing and purifying sources of power. Bornovolokov⁴⁵ provides a foundational text on the Pentecostal experience, which likely includes discussions of these themes. The teaching of Christian prosperity doctrine and the establishment of business ventures were found to be significant.

Teachings in most mega churches revolves around prosperity, miracles and financial breakthrough. While this is important to keep people sane in the midst of overwhelming situations confronting the populace, it endangers the spiritual growth of people, and allows people to do just anything to be prosperous whether it is right or wrong. With the apparent upsurge of the number of Pentecostal churches in Abuja, and Nigeria as a whole, the manifold wickedness and corruption in the society and within the churches proves that Christianity is not all about signs and wonders but regeneration of a pure heart and striving to make heaven.

Marketing religion for commercial (or profitable) purposes is not a new trend, but an age-long phenomenon. Scholars have argued that during the mediaeval period, merchants at religious

³⁷ "Nigerian megachurches practise the prosperity they preach" <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2021/09/23/nigerian-megachurches-practise-the-prosperity-they-preach>. 14, December, 2023

³⁸ "Business behind the pulpit - Business day NG" <https://businessday.ng/news/news-features/article/business-behind-the-pulpit/?amp=1> 16, December, 2023

³⁹ Tim Cocks. "Mega Churches and Nigeria's Economy." (The Africa Report, 13, October, 2014) "MegaChurches and Nigeria's economy - The Africa Report.com" <https://www.theafricareport.com/3882/megachurches-and-nigerias-economy/> 16, December, 2023

⁴⁰ "Business behind the pulpit - Businessday NG" <https://businessday.ng/news/news-features/article/business-behind-the-pulpit/?amp=1>. 16, December, 2023

⁴¹ "Revealed: Nigeria's rich mega churches pay pastors poor salaries - Punch Newspapers" <https://punchng.com/revealed-nigerias-rich-mega-churches-pay-pastors-poor-salaries/?amp=1>. 14, December, 2023

⁴² Monday Adah Ogbe, 266

⁴³ Jacques Theron. "Money Matters in Pentecostal Circles. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 37.2 (September, 2011):11

⁴⁴ Birgit Meyer. "The Power of Money: Politics, Occult Forces and Pentecostalism in Ghana" *African Studies Review* 41.3 (December, 1998):19 <https://doi.org/10.2307/525352>

⁴⁵ Oleg Bornovolokov. Theological Reflections: Eastern European Journal of Theology. Book Review Spirit and Power: Foundations of Pentecostal Experience by William W. Menzies and Robert P. Menzies. Researchgate.net

fairs sold souvenirs and other commercial wares to travellers during holy pilgrimages.⁴⁶ However, in the twenty-first century, religious marketing has become a global phenomenon for religious organizations using 'God' as their main product. That is 'God' serves as a means of advertising ecclesiastical ideas, commodities, and services of a recognized religious body. These commodities are the forms of spiritual paraphernalia such as the sale of digital tunes, anointing oil, miracle water, car stickers and logos, spiritual books, and other accessories. Such commodities also serve as communication links between the religious organizations, the current followers as well as potential followers and God.⁴⁷ Hence, the deification of 'God' has become a global phenomenon and a platform to win souls, increase membership, and increase financial strength. Therefore, branding faith becomes necessary for distinction, while certain programmes such as 'Power Must Change Hands' of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles (MFM), 'Let's Go A Fishing' of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) and 'Atmosphere For Miracles' of Believers' Love World (BLW) weekly programmes have become very popular. This expands the aura of the religious organization and equally elevates the political status of such religious bodies in the society.⁴⁸

Challenges and Criticisms of Pentecostalism in Abuja

Pentecostalism in Abuja, Nigeria, has faced several challenges and criticisms, which include:

Lack of accountability: One of the reasons for the criticisms against Pentecostal leaders in Nigeria is the lack of accountability in their actions and decisions.⁴⁹

Corruption and inequality: The prosperity gospel preached by some Pentecostal preachers has been criticized for promoting corruption and inequality, as many church leaders amass wealth and influence while criticizing politicians' greed and government corruption.⁵⁰

Political impact: The political influence of Pentecostalism in Nigeria has been questioned, with some arguing that the

movement does not effectively translate its political power into tangible, significant political influence that facilitates the democratic process.

Socio-economic impact: The growth of Pentecostalism in Nigeria has been attributed to the country's socio-economic challenges, such as poverty and inequality, which the movement aims to address through various economic and political outfits.⁵¹

Despite these challenges and criticisms, Pentecostalism remains a significant religious force in Nigeria, with many churches and organizations contributing to the country's social, economic, and political development.⁵²

CONCLUSION

The growth of Pentecostalism in Nigeria owes a lot to the rising spate of poverty and squalor in the country. When individuals began to seek spiritual solutions for their physical problem, Pentecostal churches with their prosperity messages logically appears as anchor point. However, the rise of Pentecostalism in Abuja has been accompanied by the emergence of entrepreneurial religions and mega pastors who preach the gospel of prosperity, miracles, and money. The study contributes to the literature on Pentecostalism and prosperity gospel in Nigeria and beyond. It argues that while Pentecostalism may serve as a spiritual and economic resource for many, its emergence needs to be seen as an expression of the local population's structural vulnerabilities. This paper offers a way forward, advocating for greater public oversight of the use of religion and for the development of policies to protect the rights of local populations. Pentecostalism has been instrumental in creating a language of hope, faith and prosperity which has become engrained in the collective consciousness of Abuja. A balance needs to be sought in the activities of mega pastors in Abuja to avoid impoverishing people rather than providing the succor people seek which have led them to embracing the gospel of Pentecostalism.

⁴⁶ Finke and Iannaccone, "Supply-side explanations," 27-39. Moore, Selling God. Turner and Turner. *Image and*

Pilgrimage in Christian Culture. Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry, "The Sacred and the Profane in Consumer Behavior," 1-38. McDannell, Material Christianity.

⁴⁷ Oluwaseun O. Afolabi, Solomon Ayantayo Ojo and Oderinde Peter Ayoola, 7

⁴⁸ Oluwaseun O. Afolabi, Solomon Ayantayo Ojo and Oderinde Peter Ayoola, 7

⁴⁹ Benson Ohihon Igboin, 15

⁵⁰ Daniel Jordan Smith, 109

⁵¹ Benson Ohihon Igboin, 14

⁵² Donatus, Pius Ukpong. "Presence and Impact of Pentecostalism in Nigeria" *GloPent*, (2006):26. <https://www.glopent.net/Members/frdona/presence-and-impact-of-pentecostalism-in-nigeria>. 14, December, 2023

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