

Roles of Pentecostalism in the Political and Economic Development of Nigeria between 1999 and 2015

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Abstract

Nigeria is a country that is shaken by recurrent socio-economic and political crises, which started right after the implementation of the structural adjustment program since the early 1980s under the military regimes. A number of scholars have argued that religion played a crucial role in the political truce that ushered in the democratic government of former President Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999. This paper analyzes the extent to which Pentecostalism became instrumental to the political and economic development of Nigeria. Pentecostalism became more involved in politics, establishing itself as a crucial force in political decision-making at the national level. Relative Deprivation theory is used to explain the popularity of the Pentecostal movement and reason for their involvement in the Nigerian politics. The paper also uses descriptive analysis to identify the role of Pentecostalism in the political development of Nigeria between 1999 and 2015. The democratization of the media in addition to the wealth and size of Pentecostal churches encouraged the growth of Pentecostalism, but also heightened religious tensions in Nigeria. Many Nigerians have turned to the new faith in an attempt to access its perceived spiritual, social, economic, and political rewards. The permutation of the theocratic class that by gaining political power to stop the killings of Christians in the northern part of the country has failed to achieve the solution to peacebuilding.

Keywords: Pentecostalism, Politics, Media, Relative Deprivation, Civil Religion, Nigeria

Introduction

The term “Pentecostalism” is difficult to define, but its characteristics is more cumbersome to understand due to its fluid nature and global dimension. Spreading rapidly throughout the world in less than a century, the movement would eventually become the largest force in Christendom after the Roman Catholic (Anderson, 2004: 1). Pentecostalism as the theologian Anderson Allan describes it, began a century ago and continues to grow rapidly in the twenty-first century (Anderson, 2004: 1-2). The popularity of the movement swells at a staggering rate, which makes Pentecostal adherents one out of every four Christians in the world (Kwon, 2006). After the birth of modern Pentecostalism over ninety-six years ago at Azusa Street in Los Angeles, today there is an estimated of 667,216,00 million evangelicals including Pentecostals/Charismatics in the world, a figure that by 2050 is estimated to increase to over 1 billion (Center for the Study of Global Christianity, 2022: N/A). Conversely, David Barrett in 1997 puts his own figures at 497 million and argues that a large proportion of Pentecostals will live in sub-Saharan Africa (Barrett, 1997). Nevertheless, it is important to note here that collating statistics of Pentecostals in the sub-Saharan Africa is an uphill task for different reasons: The first reason is as a result of the irregularities in census figures in many of these countries; while the second reason arises from the fact that these statistics are classified along the lines of church denominations. Thirdly, schism has allowed the proliferation of newer

churches. It is therefore difficult to account for all the different Pentecostal movements; especially those in sub-Saharan Africa (Ogbu, 2008: 5).

The growth of Pentecostalism in contemporary times cannot be overlooked. Theologian Ogbu Kalu mentions that the movement appears to be unstoppable and globally significant (Ogbu, 2008: 5). For Anderson, Pentecostalism's definition is problematic, this is because it embraces variegated sub-movement that includes: Classical Pentecostals, Neo-Charismatics, Charismatic Renewal movement, and Pentecostal or 'Pentecostal-like' indigenous churches in the third world (Anderson, 2004: 2). Other definitions of Pentecostalism include terms like Neo-Pentecostals and also non-denominational churches (Anderson, 2013: 2). Scholars like Allan Anderson, Paul Gifford and J Kwabena have different perspectives on this issue, but came to a conclusion that the variety of Pentecostal denominations are confusing (Anderson, 2013; Ogbu, 2008: 5; and Kwabena, 2004: 13).

Since the rebirth of Pentecostalism in Azusa Street (1906-1909), the most noteworthy aspect of the Pentecostal Church's beliefs is the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Robeck Jr, 2006: 4). In order to fully understand the different denominations in Pentecostalism, it is crucial to highlight the common resemblance of the movement. Pentecostals hold to the core doctrines of the deity of Jesus Christ, and the belief that the Bible is the Word of God. Furthermore, like other Christians, they believe the Holy Spirit is the divine, third person of the Trinity, co-equal to the Father and Son, who the ascended Jesus sent on the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. Placing one's faith in Christ by repentance attains salvation for Pentecostals. It is also their belief that the Holy Spirit takes up residency in a Christian at the time of conversion, but that the Baptism of the Spirit is a separate, defining and more intense experience" (Macchia, 2006: 117-118). The Pentecostals do not condone sin against the Holy Spirit, it is regarded as an 'unpardonable sin' and as such, blasphemous. Quoting Karl Barth, Bernard David argues that the "Holy Spirit is the coming of the man of Jesus, who is the Son of God" (Bernard, 1999: 174). As modern Pentecostalism progressed, McBride Dennis remarked that there are five tenets, which are "true of mainline denominational Pentecostalism" today (McBride, 1996: 4).

The first tenet is restoration, by which God is said to be reviving the church, which had hitherto lost its powers, by restoring the first century apostolic authority and power. The second tenet encourages spiritual manifestations through experience with Holy Spirit. This aspect also encourages experience with Holy Spirit as the measure of truth. The third tenet exalts spiritual leaders and calls for the continual generation of leaders who are at the level of celebrities. The fourth aspect of the theology places heavy emphasis on the characteristics of Pentecostalism. These are: healing, baptism of Holy Spirit in tongues, and the second coming of Christ. Here, other doctrines are generally ignored and 'systematic biblical exposition is almost non-existent'. The last feature desires unity in the church, something, considering the different taxonomies of Pentecostalism we have today, the movement has clearly failed to achieve (McBride, 1996: 4).

Before assessing the overview of the phenomenon of Pentecostalism in Nigeria, it is worth mentioning as the Neo-Pentecostal and Neo-Charismatic churches are often enormous in terms of influence, size and wealth. Anderson categorizes these churches as the fastest growing sections of Christianity; they often draw their converts from younger and better-educated urban population (Anderson, 2004: 19-20). Some Nigerian churches that fit in the category of *Sola Christianity* in Nigeria includes: United Native African Church, Christ African Church (Bethel), United African Methodist Church, Kingdom of God Church, Kingdom of God Church, New Life Church; etc. Ukpong opines that African nationalism is the key doctrinal principle and worship for these churches. In contrast, the *Scriptura* churches, since their theology is based on biblical analogy as mentioned earlier, they demonstrate an

immense attraction to the Bible, but still the Bible is interpreted from the perspective of African spirituality. An example of these churches in Nigeria under classical Pentecostalism is The Apostolic Church of Nigeria.

The Neo-Pentecostalism under *Scriptura* churches is derived from the word Neo, meaning new Pentecostalism. Mainly independent preachers who placed stronger emphasis on miraculous manifestations (are not affiliated to old or classical churches of Foursquare Gospel or Assembly of God churches) are the ones that spread this movement (McBride, 1996: 4). The Deeper Life Bible Church, Winners' Chapel, House of God, Christ Embassy, the Church of God Mission, the Latter Rain Assembly, etc. are among the churches that represent the Neo-Pentecostal churches in Nigeria.

The objective of this paper is to analyze the extent to which Pentecostalism became instrumental to the political and economic development of Nigeria. Pentecostalism became more involved in politics, establishing itself as a crucial force in political decision-making at the national level. The Relative Deprivation theory is used to explain the popularity of the Pentecostal movement and reason for their involvement in the Nigerian politics. The paper uses descriptive analysis to identify the role of Pentecostalism in the political development of Nigeria between 1999 and 2015.

An Overview of the History of Pentecostalism in Nigeria

Before the rise and contemporary success of Nigerian Pentecostalism is analyzed, the roots of Christianity in Nigeria will be briefly discussed. Although Pentecostalism is a relatively new phenomenon in Nigeria, Christianity began in the country with the advent of Portuguese capuchins and explorers in the area today known as the Niger Delta. By 1485, the Portuguese docked their ships around Warri and not only traded with the locals, but also introduced their belief to the people who gradually became converts, mostly Catholics. As part of the strategy to Christianize the locals, the kings were targeted first. Therefore, as the kings became Christians, each kingdom began to shift towards Christianity. More people rather practiced syncretism than pure Christianity (Ukpong, 2006: 4). The kings only allowed elements of Christian in their cult. By 1894, evangelical works had been intensified in the west of Nigeria by returning slaves preaching for the Anglican church of England. A notable figure was a former slave of Yoruba origin, Ajayi Crowther, becoming the first black Anglican bishop. By the 19th and 20th centuries, new waves of missionaries were flooding Nigeria and Azusa Street mission also got involved in this enterprise. For instance:

The African contacts and networks with the American Pentecostalism increased in the 1980s through television programs, books, video cassettes, and ministerial organizations that are set up in different parts to coordinate or facilitate outreach events (Ogbu, 2008: 14).

This created a new form of Christianity in Nigeria, which concentrated more on the afflicted, poor, wounded and lower class of the society, using the Holy Spirit as a vehicle for prayer and healing, something which was achieved to a great degree. For Ukpong, the beginning of the Pentecostal occurred when the Aladura congregation in Yorubaland, a puritanical religious group adopted religious spirituality without traditional cultic paraphernalia, renouncing all forms of idolatry. Ukpong emphasizes that 'peculiar situations' accounted for the 20th century rise of evangelism, positing that terrible diseases and poverty ravaged the country. As foreign missionaries were more conservative in their preaching about poverty, African prophets, as Ukpong observes, "counted their converts in hundreds of thousands" through their willingness to talk openly about such subject matter (Ukpong, 2006: 4).

Here it is worth mentioning that the achievements of African religious movements are often eclipsed by external influences. One notable event that exemplifies this fact is the event that took place in Nigeria in 1934. This event was similar to the episode that was witnessed at Azusa Street twenty-eight years earlier. Five men spoke in tongues in a Faith Tabernacle church, which was contrary to the church's belief. Ogbu Kalu remarks that they were expelled from the church, and in 1939, they joined the Assemblies of God. However, this argument is premised on the basis that Africans have lost their story and embraced another people's legend, for instance the account of Azusa Street that had earlier been discussed (Ogbu, 2008: 14). Therefore, it is crucial to stress the positive achievements of the Pentecostals during this period. Whether these churches were exploiting their members to achieve their aims is a question that is difficult to answer, especially because, as we have seen, Pentecostal churches are diverse in their orientation, doctrines, and leadership structures (Magbadelo, 2004: 24). One of the major concerns of the new movements of course was to eradicate witchcraft and prayer was seen as an antidote. From the foregoing, it is clear that putting the phenomenon of Pentecostalism and its interface with socio-political and economic conditions in Nigeria under the spotlight is a crucial exercise for this paper.

The Rise of Pentecostalism in Nigeria

In recent times Nigeria has witnessed an explosive spiritual awakening. Continuous waves of Pentecostal and Charismatic revivalism have influenced Christian churches all across Nigeria, a country that has been shaken by recurrent socio-economic and political crises, which started right after the implementation of the structural adjustment programme since the early 1980s under the military regimes. The effect of this was a creation of a pool of vulnerable citizens who had been badly hit psychologically by the recessions. Amidst these problems, political leaders, business moguls and even traditional rulers (the supposedly custodian of indigenous cultures) have taken up the appellation of 'born-again' (Fakoya, 2008).

As part of the strategies of Pentecostal churches to win prominent figures in the country, the movement forcibly or vigorously preaches against their affiliation to African fraternities that promote 'spiritism' such as the Reformed Ogboni fraternity or groups like the Rosicrucian Order and Masonic Lodge. On the other hand, Obed Minchakpu opines that this spiritual explosion was heightened by an inability on the part of the mainline churches (for instance, the Methodist and Anglican churches) to address the spiritual urge of people looking for the power of the Holy Spirit (Minchakpu, 2013). This gives the Pentecostals an edge over the mainline churches.

In his analysis on Pentecostalism in Nigeria, Magbadelo John insists "the movement may have become so entrenched in Christian circles in Nigeria, to such an extent that prospective planters of churches utilize the Pentecostal identity for galvanizing popular followings" (Magbadelo, 2004: 16). He continues by describing these churches as the ones enjoying great recognition as many Christians openly identify with programmes set up by Pentecostal pastors. The demonstration of 'miracles' has often been a tool of evangelization in their outreaches. The systematic attempt of Pentecostal churches to preach messages of healing, miracles and prosperity continued to feast on the psychology of the masses that truthfully seek relief from the daily reality (Magbadelo, 2004: 17). These churches often target institutions of higher learning as a breeding ground for young elites who will in turn serve as ambassadors of various denominations in the larger society. Fakoya Olusegun, remarks that:

"In our increasingly norm-less society, the educational system has practically collapsed and those who are being trained to propel the country forward are now relegating knowledge to the background on the platform of religion" (Fakoya, 2008).

However, the success of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria would not have been possible without the media support. In the next part, the influence of religious broadcasts on the growth of Pentecostalism will be addressed to understand the nexus between media and religion.

The Role of Media on Religion in Nigeria

Nigeria boasts of an overwhelming vibrant media marketplace. Apart from dozens of daily newspapers, there is an already saturated broadcast industry comprising of radio, television and video films in the country. Since its independence in 1960, Nigeria's successive constitutions have all stipulated the freedom of religious association, expression and practice. Ukah Asonzeh states that although the constitution guarantees the aforementioned rights, they have not explicitly guaranteed the right to own and operate a broadcast medium to citizens. This is because there is mutual suspicion between Christians and Muslims in the country (Asonzeh, 2011: 39). Nevertheless, from 1990 onwards, the broadcast industry was deregulated and gave rights to private individuals or groups to conduct business activities in the sector. Nevertheless, from 1990 onwards, the broadcast industry was deregulated and gave rights to private individuals or groups to conduct business activities in the sector.

Since 1992, the country witnessed a mammoth growth of broadcast firms, such that by 2008, there were about 284 of such companies (Asonzeh, 2011: 39). The effect of this was mass abuse of religious speech, excessive politicization of religion and constant use of this medium to heighten religious tensions. As a result of the size and wealth of the Pentecostal churches, they were able to secure broadcasting rights and programmes on television and radio. Most of their programmes showcased testimonies, supposed miracles, the invocation of Holy Spirit, and mostly prosperity testimonies. Since Nigeria is a secular, multi-ethnic and multi-religious country, the Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation came up with certain codes to safeguard the religious and ethnic sensitivities of the country. Section 4.4 of the Nigeria Broadcasting Code (NBC) stipulates guidelines of religious broadcasting. It begins with a preamble that:

Recognizes the centrality of religious practices in the lives of Nigerians; [it further states] the capacity of religion to evoke "strong passions and emotions" since it carries "varying sensibilities and sensitivities", [and] the multi-religious character of the society (Nigeria Broadcasting Code, 1960 quoted in Asonzeh, 2011: 46).

At the heart of the Code reveals that: "religious broadcast shall not exceed 10% of the total weekly airtime of any station" (Nigeria Broadcasting Code, 1960 quoted in Asonzeh, 2011: 47). The manner and content of such programmes are also clearly controlled. The Code equally stipulates that religious programme shall be broadcast "respectfully and accurately". Accordingly, religious broadcast should not be presented in such a way to mislead the public (Nigeria Broadcasting Code, 1960 quoted in Asonzeh, 2011: 47). In his words, Asonzeh remarks that: Pentecostalism spread like 'wild fire'. He argues further that churches rival themselves for membership and this rivalry are still the hallmark of their evangelism. Hence, attractive packages become imperative. Many Posters advertises instant miracles in what he describes as the distinctive feature of Pentecostal churches (Asonzeh, 2011: 50).

Many of these pastors, evangelists or bishops openly claim the need to experience miracles in one's life. Of course, the socio-economic situation in Nigeria allows for the acceptance of such claims as what Chris Oyakilome of Believers' Love claims. Asonzeh succinctly quotes him that:

I have the message that certainly heals people. You cannot hear the message and remain sick, poor or dejected. It will bring hope and life...[of] a necessity, there will be healing and miracles [following this message] (Asonzeh, 2011: 49)

New Pentecostal leaders who are bent on proving credibility to their ‘competitors’ downplay the public display of miracles in the liturgy of Islam and indigenous religions in Nigeria (Fakoya, 2008). This became possible as result of their wealth, which was acquired through the collection of tithes and offerings. Also, the bulk of their untaxed revenues are derived from marketing media product like books, magazines, video, and audiotapes (Asonzeh, 2011: 47).

The Nigeria Broadcast industry is widely saturated by religious programmes regardless of the Code that stipulates 10% weekly airtime on television and radio stations. Both Islam and Pentecostal churches battle on the airwaves to win new converts and not infrequently make an extra effort to disparage each other. Asonzeh identified two different areas where the Pentecostal pastors exploited to exert their influence on NBC. In the first instance, he mentions that the:

Pastors recognized the powers of images and the technology of broadcasting media in creating leverage in the competition for loyalties [as well as their control over] cash-strapped media organizations, particularly the government-owned and controlled stations, which craved for the patronage of religious entrepreneurs in recruiting revenues from sponsored religious programmes and religious advertising (Asonzeh, 2011: 49).

By March 30th, 2004, religious miracles on television and radio stations reached the height of irritation and the director of the NBC, Dr. Silas Babajiyi issued a one-month ultimatum to all broadcast stations that the indiscriminate advertisement of miracles should be stopped and that the Code of the Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation should be respected. Asonzeh quotes Babajiyi that miracles on airwaves should be ‘provable’, ‘verifiable’ and ‘believable’. Nowadays, many of these programmes have switched their style from the performance of ‘miracles’ to religious teachings as on Okotie’s renamed *Teaching Programme and LoveWorld* (Asonzeh, 2011: 51).

Some Pentecostal churches enticed the Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation with an offer that made religious programmes a priority on television and radio. For instance, in 2002, the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) claimed it was investing over eight million naira each quarter to finance its programmes on 28 broadcast stations in Nigeria (Asonzeh, 2011: 50). This section has sought to describe the role of the media in encouraging the spread of Pentecostalism in Nigeria. The next section will seek to address this paper’s question: to what extent is Pentecostalism becoming a civil religion? Moreover, the section will also analyze the involvement of Christians in the politics of Nigeria and analyze theoretical explanations that connect the everyday experience of the average Nigerian and will be put forward in an attempt to offer a better understanding of the social reality in the country.

Pentecostalism and Nigerian Politics between 1999-2015

Since the early 1970s, Pentecostal Christianity (born-again) has become a growing force across the world, especially in Latin America and Africa (Marshall, 2009: 2). Lagos, Nigeria is arguably the most Pentecostal city in the world (Anderson, 2004: 2). In Lagos, every street corner has visible signboards of churches, especially Pentecostal churches. As Anderson describes, Pentecostals adherents preach in buses, at market places and in massive campgrounds, tents, stadiums, and on the streets. Asamoah-Gyadu and Anderson maintain that:

With [Pentecostals’] mega-church philosophies and world dominating agenda for Christianity and religious entrepreneurial ambitions that translate their salvation to success in everyday life, they have dominated the media and their activities have also

affected all forms of Christianity in Nigeria (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005: 1 and Anderson, 2004: 2).

The above quote illustrates the number of outreaches and parishes the Pentecostal churches establish every year. In the case of The Redeemed Christian Church of God, headed by Pastor Enoch Adeboye, it is the fastest growing church, with 5000 branches in the world and 4000 of them are in Nigeria alone (Obadare, 2006:10). As earlier noted, it was the socio-political and economic situation of the country that made the source of recruitments into Pentecostal churches prevalent; the messages of healings, miracles, and prosperity consequently became widely accepted. The pastors then rely on Nigeria's socio-economic and political problems to conjure invisible powers and heavenly visitations through "deliverance as solutions to the problems of the masses" (Marshall, 2009: 2). There has been a shift in the Pentecostal doctrines of the likes of Deeper Life Bible Church and Christ Apostolic Church that preach self-denial and strict religious exercises in the 1970s to the 'prosperity gospel' of the last two decades. This is a doctrine that reiterates 'wealth' and 'success' in this world as a hallmark of salvation (Marshall, 2009: 4). As Marshall emphasizes in the critic of Ruth Marshall's *Around Political Spiritualities*, that:

Pentecostalism offers solace as a substitute for the Nigerian failed state, it is an opportunity for redemption through the working of the Holy Spirit to Christians, as a solution to their problems (Marshall, 2009: 4).

In Nigeria, Pentecostal churches are involved in improving the standard of social services, such as: the construction of roads, schools, and hospitals. In addition, many mega Pentecostal churches use their pulpit to promote social justice by speaking truth to politicians. Religion often influenced state laws such as the prohibition of alcohol, striking balance in employment, nomination by pilgrim boards for pilgrimages and political offices in Nigeria. The influence of religion in the polity implies that Nigeria is not a secular but a theocratic diarchy (influenced by Christianity and Islam). This means a country significantly influenced by two religions. Hence, religious sensitivity is high and religious intolerance has worsened over the years due to politicization of religion and religionization of politics. Nigeria has been enveloped by religious divisions, thereby creating tensions among the two dominant religions (Christianity and Islam) in the country. Since the beginning of the 4th Republic (1999), tensions have heightened between Christian majority south and Muslim majority north and the spill over tensions is manifesting in the Nigerian democratic processes. The permutation that favored religion is used to gain political and economic advantage over others, thereby creating a condition of deprivation or horizontal inequality. The Christians and Muslims struggle for political and religious supremacy, appropriation of state power, and legitimacy to order the state according to religious precepts. Having explained what makes Pentecostalism popular Christians in the country, it is necessary to also consider a theoretical explanation to support the arguments.

Relative Deprivation Theory

The Relative Deprivation theory is used here to explain the popularity of the Pentecostal movement and reason for their involvement in the Nigeria politics, which was hitherto regarded widely as a 'dirty game'. It earned the appellation because it involves murder, corruption, nepotism, and so on. Scholars such as Allan Anderson have associated the phenomenon of Pentecostalism to a mystical experience of baptism of fire made tangible by the gift of tongues and the belief in spirits. This has led to the conclusion of Anderson et al that "writers assumed that Pentecostals were religious fanatics who were psychologically unstable, neurotic, and deprived" (Anderson, 2010: 22). Anderson further states that social historians, especially Robert Anderson, saw Pentecostalism as refuge for the socially deprived

poor, the vision of the disadvantage, and it is also a place where ecstatic religious experience was a surrogate for success in the social struggle (Anderson, 2010: 22). Relative Deprivation Theory itself states that people feel discontent if they recognise an unfavourable balance between 'value expectation' and 'value capabilities'. This means that it will get to a point where people would notice that they want more than they have and have less than they rightfully feel is entitled to them, resulting into feeling like anger, grievance, moral outrage or resentment (Mummendy 1999: 231). From this theory, inference could be drawn that Christians in Nigeria are more likely to find refuge in Pentecostal churches since their hope of riches from the national crude oil have collapsed into a reality of recurrent economic decline and political instability. Pentecostalism has other positive impact in the society. Their orientation is to positively train converts to become deeply rooted in Christ. These trainees are expected to make positive impact in the society, multiplying the effect in the corporate and individual settings.

It is also important to explain the role of religion in the political economy of Nigeria, which institutionalized Pentecostalism as a civil religion. The 'so-called' accusation of President Goodluck Jonathan's interference in Osun State election by Muslim Rights Concern of Nigeria (MURIC) lends credence to the influence of Pentecostalism also as a civil religion (Daily Trust 2014: n/a). The concerns of MURIC may be genuine since many Christian organizations including, Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) formed an alliance called the Pentecostal theocratic class in 1999 to wrestle national power from the devil that reside in the North of Nigeria (Obadare, 2006: 10). Since 1999, many Nigerian politicians continue to openly solicit the endorsements of mega Pentecostal pastors during Presidential elections campaign for the promotion of political gains.

Assessment of Civil Religion in Nigeria between 1999-2015

The period 1987-1999 was characterised by ruthless military rule, dominated by Muslim Hausa/Fulani from the northern part of Nigeria. Several political, religious, and economic tensions nearly led to disintegration and secession of the three (Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo), dominant ethnic groups in the country (Ojewale, quoted in Marshall, 2009: 1). An example of such tension was the annulment of June 12, 1993 presidential election by General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida. The clear winner, Chief M.K.O Abiola, a multi-billionaire from the west was a Muslim. Although a Muslim, he was imprisoned and later died shortly after his release. His wife Kudirat Abiola along with some other prominent western human right activists and politicians were also gruesomely murdered by the successor of General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, General Sani Abacha. The political deadlock situation was resolved in 1999, with the assumption of former General Olusegun Obasanjo to Presidency, a self-acclaimed 'born-again' Christian from the western part of the country (Obadare, 2006: 1). Drawing from the above quote of pastor Ojewale, the Pentecostal's wealthy group, which Obadare calls 'theocratic class' before 1999 wanted to win the country for Jesus with their unanimous support for Obasanjo in what Obadare call the "Christianization of Nigeria" (Obadare, 2006: 2). Another major reason for the involvement of the Christians in politics is the frequent killings of the Christians in the northern part of the country that is predominantly Muslim. Therefore, in the continuing struggle to dispossess the economic, religious, and political right from the 'devil' that dwell in the north, a clarion call to battle was declared by the Pentecostal Christians to wade off the evil. In analysing the entry of Pentecostals into politics, which the founding of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) in 1999 was also

an important factor, it becomes unavoidable to consider the example of civil religion of Robert Bellah.

Civil religion as a term came from the role of religion in politics in America. However, the fact that Christianity was not antagonistic of democracy as in the case of France before the revolution inspires Robert Bellah to argue that religion was the entirety of the American life. Robert Bellah draws his inspiration from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's philosophy that religion acts upon the individual. For Bellah, most people in the United States shares mutual features expressed through beliefs, symbols, and rituals. This in turn supplies a religious flair to the American way of life (Bella, 1967: 1-21 and Cristi, 2001: 293). One should bear in mind that modern Pentecostalism permeated Africa through Azusa Street in Los Angeles; therefore, considering civil religion in Nigeria is very pertinent to analyzing Pentecostalism in this paper. Indeed, some of the features of civil religion in Nigeria, which is considered, could be traced to the civil religion in United States. Put differently, the dimension that civil religion takes in America could also be discerned in Nigeria. These characteristics are mostly evident among the Christians in Nigeria, which Obadare calls 'theocratic class' (Obadare, 2006: 5). Some of these features include: the invocation of God in political speeches and public gatherings; quotation of religious texts in public functions; the veneration of past public leaders and; the lives of some of these leaders are used to teach moral ideals; and sponsoring believers to contest for elective positions (Williams, 1998: 94). An important feature of Civil religion is pulpit politics. This is where Nigerian pastors use their platforms to promote specific political candidate of their choice for elections. Other notable example is to use the pulpit to promote social justice, equity, and national character in public service.

After the political truce that ushered Olusegun Obasanjo into Presidency in 1999, all levels of Nigerian society became affected by Pentecostal revival, which has been building slowly for decades. Both fanatical Muslims who formerly persecuted Christians and some prominent political leaders once imprisoned by the military junta began to profess Christianity (Minchakpu, 2013: n/a). Examples of such profession are evident in Obasanjo's statement when he said: "For me, God used the hardship and the tribulation of prison to draw me closer to Him". Also, Dr Frederick Fasehun, the founder of OOdua Peoples' Congress (an ethnic militia group), who was arrested on Dec. 18, 1996, and released in June 1998, mentions that: "prison inmates in Nigeria cherish the Bible. In the prelude to the 1999 Presidential election, former president Olusegun Obasanjo visited the headquarters of the Foursquare Gospel church in Yaba, Lagos, (where one of the researchers was baptized) for political support. He was welcomed on a red carpet while he preached on the pulpit as if he was trained in theology. Of 26 other political detainees released in Nigeria, approximately 10 renounced their former lifestyles and became Christians (Minchakpu, 2013: n/a).

Without doubt, Obasanjo electoral victory would not have been successful without the backing of the 'theocratic class,' Obadare further notes that one of the prominent features of this class is their massive wealth. There is no doubt in his remark that:

[Nowadays,] leaders of Pentecostal churches are not merely rich (or at least their churches are), they are also conscious of being seen to be prosperous and the trope is recurring refrain in their sermon... Such is the role money plays in Christianity" (Obadare, 2006: 5).

The successor to President Obasanjo, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan frequently solicited prayers for his administration through churches and the public. It is even widely held that the president could be likened to King Solomon in the Bible who always asked for God's help (Maris, 2012: na/a).



Figure 1: Example showing Pulpit politics in Nigeria

This above picture shows Pastor Enoch Adeboye of The Redeemed Christian Church of God praying for Goodluck Jonathan, the former president of Nigeria. In the fourth Republic, from pastor Ojewale to former presidents Obasanjo and Goodluck's statements, this part depicts the extent to which Pentecostalism is a civil religion in Nigeria. The assumption that Pentecostalism as a movement only has negative aspects should be discarded. Positive impacts, peculiar to the Nigerian situation alone, include the fact that the Bible has helped reawaken concern for Christian morals, especially considering that the Bible enjoys much a wider audience through its translation into several local languages and dialects. Secondly, Christian music has received a boost as a result of the explosion of Pentecostalism, a development, which has created jobs for many people. Lastly, spiritual life in the country has been rekindled through increased prayer and teaching.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to analyse the presence and the extent to which Pentecostalism has become involved and embedded in the politics of Nigeria, sponsoring candidates for general elections, thereby making the movement of the strongest religious organization in the country. The paper started by explaining the meaning of the term Pentecostalism and goes to show that the face of Christianity in Africa is rapidly changing, with Nigeria no exception in this regard. In 2023, Nigeria remains one of the most Pentecostal countries in the world with followership and branch networks of the movement increasing in numbers every year. Pentecostalism, with its roots at Azusa Street, has endeared so many people in the country because of its doctrine that embodies the work of the spirits. The Relative Deprivation Theory is used to explain the popularity of the Pentecostal movement and reason for their involvement in the Nigerian politics. Many Nigerians have turned to the new faith in an attempt to access its perceived spiritual, social, economic, and political rewards and advantages. In Nigeria, Pentecostal churches are involved in improving the standard of social services, such as: the construction of roads, schools, and hospitals. In addition, many mega Pentecostal churches use their pulpit to promote social justice by speaking truth to politicians.

The paper argues that it was the socio-political and economic situation of the country that made the source of recruitments into Pentecostal churches prevalent. Meanwhile, the messages of healings, miracles, and prosperity consequently became widely accepted. The

pastors then rely on Nigeria's socio-economic and political problems to conjure invisible powers and heavenly visitations through deliverance as solutions to the problems of the masses.

It has also been crucial to illustrate how Christians made efforts to reclaim Nigeria 'for Christ' and how the movement has been a major force in the unification of Nigeria, a country that was on the brink of disintegration before the new millennium. The Pentecostal's wealthy group, otherwise known as 'theocratic class' before 1999 wanted to win the country for Jesus with their unanimous support for president Obasanjo to Christianize Nigeria. The Pentecostal saw the opportunity to secure political power through the 1999 general elections by supporting a Christian candidate from the South. The paper identified other reason for the Pentecostals' involvement in the politics of the 4th Republic in Nigeria, which is the frequent killings of the Christians in the northern part of the country that is predominantly Muslim. Therefore, in the continuing struggle to dispossess the economic, religious, and political right from the 'devil' that dwell in the north, a clarion call to battle was declared by the Pentecostal Christians to wade off the evil. The permutation of the theocratic class that by gaining political power to stop the killings of Christians in the northern part of the country has failed to achieve the solution to peacebuilding.

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