

**CHURCH PROLIFERATION AND IMMORALITY AMONG CHRISTIAN
YOUTHS IN NIGERIA: FINDING A SOLUTION**

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Abstract

This Article focuses on church proliferation and immorality among young people in Nigeria. It looks at the contradictory growth of churches and the rise in immoral behavior among the youth. While churches are expanding rapidly, there has been a rise in drug usage, sexual promiscuity, and lying among young people. There are a number of factors found to be responsible for the proliferation of churches in Nigeria. The study observed, based on the analysis of reports from previous findings, that there are a good number of positive impacts that were recorded as a result of the proliferation of churches in Nigeria. The study listed some negative impacts, such as noise pollution, an increased number of abandoned buildings, traffic congestion, etc. The study concluded that there had been a constant progression in the spread of Christianity in Nigeria, from the early missionary endeavors to the emergence of autonomous African churches and the contemporary Pentecostal explosion. Also, there is a complicated and nuanced relationship between the growth of churches and immorality among Christian youth in Nigeria. Based on the above conclusions, the study recommended that the Christian association should create a thorough theological and moral education programs in churches that strongly emphasise fundamental Christian principles, including respect, integrity, honesty, and sexual purity, among others.

Keywords: Immorality, Youth, Christians, Church Proliferation, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a country where Christianity is deeply ingrained in the social and cultural fabric, owing to its multitude of ethnic groups and religious customs. The number of churches has significantly increased over the last few decades, which is indicative of the dynamic and changing nature of religious practice in the nation. Numerous new congregations and denominations have emerged as a result of this process, which is also referred to as "church proliferation." Numerous causes, such as urbanization, population increase are responsible for this growth.

This religious growth has had advantages, like easier access to spiritual services and communal support, but it has also presented difficulties. Among these, there has been a concerning increase in immoral behavior among young Christians. Here, the term "immorality" refers to a variety of behaviors that are viewed as immoral or wicked in the context of Christian doctrines, such as lying, drug misuse, sexual promiscuity, and a general deterioration in the observance of Christian moral principles.

The dilemma that results from the concurrent increase in church expansion and immorality among Christian adolescents in Nigeria has to be addressed immediately. On the one hand, the rise in church attendance points to elevated religious awareness and easier access to spiritual direction. However, there appears to be a mismatch between religious teachings and personal behavior, as evidenced by the ongoing and potentially rising rates of immoral activity among young people. This is a complicated, multidimensional problem with social, economic, and educational components. Rapid church growth, frequently without adequate pastoral supervision or theological depth, can lead to a moral message that is diluted and occasionally conflicting. Furthermore, traditional Christian principles are called into question by the effects of contemporary lifestyle choices and cultural pressures.

A comprehensive strategy involving church leaders, parents, educators, and the youth themselves is needed to solve this issue. The main goals of any solution should be to uphold the fundamental principles of Christian morality, enhance the standard and consistency of religious instruction, and create welcoming surroundings that promote moral behavior. It is feasible to close the gap between religious proliferation and moral behavior by looking into the root causes and putting focused interventions in place. This will help to raise a generation of young people who not only identify as Christians but also live out Christian ideals daily.

Church Proliferation in Nigeria

The need for the gospel message to be preached led to the founding of the Church. The Church has not stopped her missionary task of evangelization since the Apostolic zeal is still present in it today. Concerning the Church, however, is the fact that there are now too many denominations and sects. According to Sopuru (2019), there are several churches in Nigeria that date back to the early days of Christianity. Portuguese missionaries brought Christianity to the country in the

fifteenth century. Nevertheless, the lack of persistent missionary work and opposition from native religious customs made these early attempts mainly futile.

The introduction of British and other European missionaries to Nigeria in the 19th century marked the beginning of the country's modern Christian history. Together with other missionary organizations, including the Methodist, Baptist, and Roman Catholic missions, the Anglican Church's Church Missionary Society (CMS) made its home in Nigeria. By linking Christianity with healthcare and education, these missionaries' establishment of schools and medical facilities aided in the spread of Christianity. African leaders started starting their own separate churches as a reaction to what they saw as doctrinal conflicts and alleged racial prejudice by European missionaries. The African Church (1901) and the Aladura movement, which comprised congregations such as the Christ Apostolic Church and the Cherubim and Seraphim Church, were notable examples of these.

Numerous Nigerians turned to religion for comfort as a result of the country's economic hardships and the 1967–1970 Nigerian Civil War. Churches grew widely as havens and sources of hope in times of national crises. Pentecostal and charismatic movements saw a meteoric rise in popularity in the 1990s and early 2000s. Millions of followers were drawn to the emergence of mega-churches like Winners' Chapel, Christ Embassy, Mountain of Fire, and Miracles Ministries. With this context in mind, the growth of churches in Nigeria can be described by a dynamic structure that saw the influence of economic and urbanization factors. New churches emerged to meet the spiritual needs of urban residents as individuals relocated to cities in search of better prospects. The number of independent and unaffiliated churches has significantly increased as a result of the enterprising nature of many Nigerian pastors and the relative simplicity of founding a church. With numerous church leaders taking on significant positions in the public conversation, the Church developed into a potent socio-political force. Additionally, churches grew to be important economic players that impacted the nation's economic activity.

It has been observed that churches are opening up at an unsettling and never-before-seen rate in every possible location, including stores, warehouses, hotels, sitting rooms, unfinished buildings, and the grounds of both private and public schools. The number of churches in Nigeria has increased due to church growth, which has resulted in their proliferation. Ibiyinka (2011) claims that the quick growth of churches in Nigeria is a result of people's awareness of the country's freedom of religion.

Interrelation between church proliferation and immorality among Christian Youths in Nigeria

This subsection was addressed appropriately and in accordance with an outline of the spread of churches, the alleged rise in immorality, certain advantageous features, and a possible remedy. First and foremost, there is no way to overstate the remarkable phenomenon of the churches' explosive development in Nigeria, especially the Pentecostal and Charismatic congregations.

Urbanization, socioeconomic difficulties, and the dynamic leadership of charismatic preachers have all contributed to this spread. The ease with which new churches can be started has caused competition and division between different denominations and independent churches. With distinctive teachings, promises of wealth, and dynamic worship methods, each aims to draw disciples.

Even among Christian youth, there is an increasing feeling of moral deterioration despite the rise in the number of churches. This covers actions like lying, having multiple sexual partners, abusing drugs, and engaging in other immoral acts. Foundational Christian beliefs and moral precepts are frequently neglected in favor of prosperity gospel and miracle-centered teachings, which are the main focus of many new churches. As a result, followers may lack a solid moral foundation and profound theological insight. It's also crucial to remember that the commercialization of religion, in which building churches is primarily done for financial gain, can result in moral lapses. In an attempt to draw and keep members, pastors can refrain from preaching against immoral behavior, which would prevent them from offering moral direction.

Furthermore, the fast growth of churches may result in insufficient pastoral supervision and training. Church leaders might not be able to effectively address immoral behavior among their congregations if they lack appropriate accountability procedures. Churches frequently use contemporary music and technology, as well as other youth-focused tactics, to draw in young people. Although these strategies work well to get young people to Church, they can occasionally take precedence over the importance of moral instruction and spiritual discipline. Nigeria's socioeconomic climate, which is characterized by extreme poverty and widespread unemployment, places a great deal of strain on young people. Despite their religious affiliations, some young people may participate in unethical acts in their pursuit of financial security and social status.

Churches can have a good impact on youth by offering a sense of belonging and communal support. Programs that emphasize moral counseling, education, and mentorship might lessen immoral behavior. Church leaders' ability to deal with ethical difficulties can be improved by expanding pastoral training to include moral leadership and thorough theological study. Youths can be raised with well-rounded Christian ideals by promoting a balanced approach to lessons that incorporate prosperity, moral behavior, and spiritual development.

Furthermore, by working together, churches, families, schools, and community organizations may better serve young people by attending to both their spiritual and material needs. Strong oversight and accountability systems can be established in churches to help guarantee that leaders maintain and advance morally elevated standards.

Challenges faced by Churches in Nigeria

Challenges including theological contradictions, the commercialization of religion, and rivalry among churches also arose as a result of the fast growth of churches. Some opponents contend that fundamental Christian teachings on morality and social justice have been eclipsed by the emphasis on the prosperity gospel. The desire for material goods is the main obstacle to overcome initially. Even the so-called "Men of God" have aspirations of owning a private jet, a bulletproof jeep, a castle on every continent, a treasury, and all the Church's money. For this reason, according to Adamolekun (2012), in a given interview, some churches referred to their members as "customers" and burying all kinds of objects, including life cows, in order to draw in visitors. This resulted in the existence of fifteen churches with different names on the same street.

Impact of Proliferation of Churches

There are advantages and disadvantages to Nigeria's abundance of churches. The number of churches across the nation that established nursery and primary schools, secondary schools, and universities—which offered employment opportunities to numerous individuals—as well as teaching hospitals and mission hospitals—which also established excellent health care services and employment opportunities—is indicative of one of the main positive social impacts of church growth, which led to church proliferation. Revivals and crusades led by these churches provided healing, freedom from the shackles of oppressive forces, and miraculous healings to people experiencing a variety of spiritual and physical issues. It helps people understand how deeply religious Nigeria is and how many Christian churches are there (Adamolekun, 2012). The creation of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), which serves as a voice and advocacy for Christians against political policies and acts of injustice that go against their interests in the country, has had another effect. Additional benefits include quick evangelizing, the emergence of fresh leadership, a check and balance for orthodox churches, the encouragement of ministry specialization, and an improvement in the environment that occasionally facilitates the solution of human issues. On the other hand, Ogunbade (2020) lists the following as the detrimental effects of church proliferation:

1. Noise pollution

One of the main issues with the increasing number of churches around the country is noise pollution, which is defined as an excessively harmonic sound that is undesirable and can have negative consequences for an individual's physiology and institution. The Church's loud speakers caused constant noise pollution for the people living next to it, which got worse at night. This noise pollution can lead to hearing loss from noise exposure, which can worsen stress-related conditions like diabetes, hypertension, and mental health issues. Noise can interfere with sleep, which can impair judgment and mental health (Ogunbade, 2020).

2. Traffic congestion

Every street where churches are located experiences traffic jams during church-related events. For instance, the Lagos-Ibadan expressway is always congested during special events held by any of

the churches along the route. These events are typically monthly and are marked by slower traffic, longer travel times, and longer lines, all of which are inconvenient for other drivers.

Three main environmental consequences, including psychological and physiological ones, may result from spending more time in traffic. Second, there will be financial losses since there will be unpredictability and instability in every car service, as well as missed business appointments owing to the hours spent stuck in traffic. It may also result in a sick patient who is racing to the hospital dying. People in traffic jams may be exposed to carbon monoxide, which can cause respiratory allergies, lung and heart problems, asthma, and bronchitis. It can weaken the immune system and lead to skin cancer (Ogunbade, 2020).

3. Collapse of abandoned occupied buildings by churches due to the lack of space in the cities and urban areas:

Churches occupy abandoned buildings around which they can give way anytime and can cause injury or great calamity to the Church or one of its congregations (Ogunbade, 2020).

4. Improper ventilation

Medical professionals tell us that air is as important to our bodies as food and water. As was previously said, churches take up available space, particularly in urban areas, depriving worshippers and nearby residents of adequate ventilation, which can result in a lack of oxygen reaching the blood and mental disorders. Personality disputes, unhealthy competition for conversion by homiletically propagandistic propaganda, lack of unity, monetary crises, heresies, fanaticism, and arguing. Additionally, the doctrinal schisms that result in splits typically cause confusion among churchgoers. Similarly, some churches are founded for profit with the intention of benefiting the founders at the detriment of the members (Nigeria Newspoint, 2015).

While there are drawbacks to the growth of churches, as previously mentioned, Adesanya (2011) points out that these do not outweigh the phenomenon in their entirety. This is due to the fact that, in his view, Paul (Philippians 1:15–18) and Jesus (Mark 16:15) both advocated for the gospel to be preached to every nation in order to further the growth of God's kingdom. This is due to the fact that religion is a dynamic, living phenomenon that will undoubtedly continue to grow, rather than a fossil.

5. Moral Laxity

Our culture, and the Church in particular, have seen some moral decay as a result of the growth of churches. It is concerning how our overseers and pastors have been acting. Some of them have no remorse when they commit adultery with their members. This is due to the fact that since they are the Church's proprietor, no one can excommunicate them. When there were fewer churches, church leaders upheld discipline, and members who disobeyed faced consequences. However, this is no longer the case; instead, new churches are calling them to come and occasionally offering them positions and responsibilities. Based on this, Onwuegbu (2014) notes that, in contrast to earlier times, morality is losing its hold on churches nowadays. Those who profess to have the ability to heal go above and beyond to call upon the might of demons for healing. Ukpong (2018) notes that the nation's "official Christianity" is gradually including healing, deliverance, vision, dream, and prophecy practices.

This predicament is made worse by the global surge in Marian visions, which is fascinating to African Christians who come from a culture where seeing angelic hosts in dreams and visions is commonplace. He claims that because modern African Christianity places so much focus on this issue, one could easily conclude that neo-paganism is emerging in the nation. As reported by Umoh (2013), hundreds of accused child witches in Akwa Ibom State were put to death at the behest of their parents by a self-styled Bishop, Sunday William. He said that his parents had paid him to kill their children in order to protect their family from tragedies connected to witchcraft. In a similar vein, he claimed that a pastor had sexual relations with his biological daughters and that a pastor was on trial for raping a member of his Church.

Strategies for managing church proliferation in Nigeria

The nation's ability and willingness to implement national laws, such as those prohibiting noise pollution in the environment, will play a significant role in mitigating the negative effects of the growth of churches. When the Lagos State Government of Nigeria enforced the law on public noise pollution on June 18 and October 28, 2009, two branches of the Redeems Christian Church of God and the Mountain of Fire Church were closed because their neighbors were disturbed by the use of public address systems.

Similarly, the Lagos State Environmental Protection Agency, or LASEPA, shut down Holy Life Bible Church's Sunday service and closed the door as a result of the neighborhood's disturbance caused by the public address system (Daily Champion, 2009). If this law is implemented nationally, noise pollution will decrease. Additionally, government agents who oversee the inspection and approval of building plans can effectively carry out their duties by ensuring that no church building plan that lacks a parking space or a well-ventilated plan is approved. These agents can also inspect the buildings that are currently in use by churches to ensure that they are not occupying dilapidated, abandoned buildings that could collapse at any time.

By putting themselves in their neighbors' shoes, churches can help reduce noise pollution by refraining from using outside public address systems during their programs. In order to prevent traffic jams in their designated locations, churches should also make every effort to fully manage the flow of traffic around them while they are holding services. In order to lessen the widespread corruption and atrocities in the country—which are undervaluing the benefits of church proliferation—the General Overseers and Pastors in Charge must impart lessons on holiness and righteousness, which can transform the moral decline of the people.

Conclusion

Nigeria's historical pattern of church growth is the result of a dynamic interaction between sociopolitical shifts, economic forces, and cultural adaptation. There has been a constant progression in the spread of Christianity in Nigeria, from the early missionary endeavors to the

emergence of autonomous African churches and the contemporary Pentecostal explosion. Nigerian society has been profoundly touched by this proliferation, which has shaped its moral and cultural landscape and created new difficulties that must be addressed.

There is a complicated and nuanced relationship between the growth of churches and immorality among Christian youth in Nigeria. Church expansion offers chances for community and spiritual support, but it also raises issues with moral leadership and doctrinal integrity. In order to address these problems, a comprehensive strategy that supports Nigerian adolescents' moral and ethical growth through coordinated efforts, balanced teachings, and enhanced pastoral training is needed.

Recommendations

1. The Christian association should create thorough theological and moral education programs in churches that place a strong emphasis on fundamental Christian principles, including respect, integrity, honesty, and sexual purity.
2. Offer expanded pastoral education that consists of courses on counseling, youth involvement, and moral leadership.
3. Create and carry out youth-focused initiatives, such as Bible study groups, mentoring programs, and volunteer work.
4. Work together with families, schools, and neighborhood associations to uphold moral principles and teachings.
5. Take part in comprehensive community development and outreach programs that tackle problems that impact young people, like drug addiction, unemployment, and poverty.

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