

IMPACT OF PENTECOSTALISM IN IGBOLAND: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

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Abstract

There is no doubt that every religious sect has the potential to revolutionize its host society and Pentecostalism is no exception. In Igboland, the arrival of Pentecostalism has awakened a tremendous yearning for a primal spirituality. The Pentecostal spirituality was highly welcomed among the poor of our society, hence by the majority, since most Igbo Christians are economically poor. This impetus finds support and tremendous enthusiasm among Christians of various denominations and ecclesiastical affinity, since it addresses the raw spiritual desire of men. The boom of Pentecostalism in Igboland is a direct indication to the mainland Churches to reconsider their Christian testimony and proclamation of Jesus Christ, as the Saviour and Redeemer of all people. The advent of Pentecostalism in Igboland, constitutes a theological and ecclesiological obstacle for many theologians. Adopting the thematic historical approach, with the use of primary and secondary sources, this paper argues that it is indisputable that Pentecostal experience and spirituality have come to stay in Igboland, given their presence in virtually all parts of Igboland since the 1970s. The presence and the realness of the divine power is intrinsic to African worldview. Pentecostalism has also eaten deep into the religious consciousness of the contemporary Igbo society, and its influence and repercussions can be observed across religious strata in the Igbo society. Thus, Igboland is gradually moving into a new religious culture, developing from contemporary Pentecostalism.

Keywords- Pentecostalism, Spirituality, Igbo society, Divine power, Christian testimony

Introduction

The Igbo people as any other people in the world are religious in nature. The Igbo people believe in the supreme God. Thus, the people call Him, “Chukwu” or “Chineke”, “Obasi” and “Olisa” as the case maybe. The supreme God (Chineke) is associated with the creation of Heaven and earth, and every other thing in them. The Igbo believe that God (Chukwu) lives in Heaven. Although there are diverse beliefs in other deities, but that of (Chukwu) serves as a focal point of unity. This also depicts the monotheistic nature of Igbo belief and supremacy of “Chukwu” over deities. “Chukwu” is the supreme God in Igbo traditional religion. He is the creator in their pantheon. Igbo people believe that all things come from Him and that everything on earth, heaven and the rest of the supernatural world is under His care.

The supreme being is all powerful. He is neither an ancestor, nor a minor deity. He has no physical appearance, yet indirectly controls the affairs of the human world. Dan Chukwu opines that this “God for the Igbo is all knowing, yet, he is not knowable because the people like every other ethnic group or race, are only struggling to know a fraction of Him”.¹ This belief in the existence of a supreme being is generally accepted by most religions including Christianity. Today, Christianity which is currently one of the world largest religions consist of various denominations and sects. The Pentecostals is one of the fastest growing sects today. Their doctrines and teachings focus more on direct personal experience with God through the Holy Spirit.

Pentecostalism was not popular in Igboland before and immediately after Nigerian Independence. This is because, the Christian missionary ideology portrayed a society of Igbo people who were strongly attached to the value of church membership. But, with passage of time, the Pentecostal became visible in and around Igboland. According to Nwachukwu “Pentecostalism as it is known today, first emerged in the 1970s in Nigeria.”² It eventually witnessed fast growth and even got enshrined within the mainstream churches. Today, the movement is widely associated with amazing testimonies of God’s wondrous works.

Most prominently, Pentecostalism is known for their messages on prosperity, which according to Rotimi “appears to give hope and succour to vast majority members of toiling Nigerians”³. The phenomenal growth of the Pentecostalism has consequently revolutionized the religious and even cultural pattern of many societies, including the Igbo. No wonder Kalu opines “that the Pentecostals are multiplying in Igbo land. They are steadily, exerting a great deal of influence on a large number of Christians across the broad section of the Christian faith”⁴

The coming of Pentecostalism in Igboland cannot be x-rayed in the absence of the revival movement in Azuza street. Reason is, the movement attracted immigrants from all over the western world with the aims of acquiring

experiences of the gift of Holy Spirit (which was discovered by Agnes Ozman, the first mortal to speak in tongues. The report of Allan Anderson, however states that the present-day Pentecostalism traced their origins to the revival movement in Azuza street. According to Anderson, twenty-six different Pentecostal denominations trace their origin to Azuza street, including the first Pentecostal church in Igboland, Assemblies of God. "People went there from Europe and other parts of North America and went back with the baptism and Pentecostal missionaries, were sent out all over the world reaching over twenty-five nations in two years"⁵.

Since its arrival in Igboland, Pentecostalism has been spreading like wild fire as churches continue to occupy available spaces like shops and some uncompleted buildings. "Some are equally found in hotels. For instance, a branch of Dominion City in Imo state is situated within the premises of Radisson Hotels in Owerri"⁶. In addition, churches are found in great numbers along the streets and roads such as the case with Limca road in Nkpor, Anambra State and Oguta road in Onitsha, where almost six Pentecostal churches are located. And even in Umudagu road in Owerri, Imo state, which has not less than five Pentecostal churches, situated on the street.

Various factors are responsible for the spread of Pentecostal movement in Igboland. Some of these factors are, though, not limited to, are the quest for miracles, deliverance and economic prosperity. Though, it is still contentious if the quest for miracles and deliverance represent the principal factors that contributed to the spread of Pentecostalism in Igboland. As observed by H. O. D. Ahukwe, "there is undue emphasis on prosperity (in Pentecostalism) and in most cases to the exclusion of spiritual prosperity which is what God is more concerned about".⁷ Many of these Pentecostal churches have diversified the sources of their incomes. Apart from the normal tithes, seed sowings, offerings and donations, many of them produce religious memorabilia such as aprons or bibs, handkerchiefs, books, magazines anointing oil and bottled and sachet water. Their members are always the major buyers of these articles.

As said earlier, one of the major reasons for the spread and growth of Pentecostalism is the quest for miracles and economic breakthrough. In order to make their churches look unique, the founders of these religious organisations, resort to miracle performance. This is an extraordinary event in the physical world that surpasses all known human powers and is ascribed to a supernatural cause. During their services, predictions, speaking in tongues and prophecies are alleged to occur. Services in the Pentecostal Churches are never predictable. Anything can happen. Their liturgy is not rigid but fluid and flexible, Today, one hardly notices any difference between the mainline Churches worship services and the Pentecostal Churches worship services.

When Pentecostalism first came to Igboland, it probably introduced a new culture and ideology somehow different from the early missionaries' ideologies. Mainline Christians first imbibed the culture of the white missionaries who planted Christianity in Nigeria and had settled down long with it before the emergence of Pentecostalism. When Pentecostalism showed up, it seems that its ideologies contradict and disrupt the already existing theology of the missionary Christianity. Sure, it met with stiff resistance as older Christians sharply repudiated the encroachment of Pentecostalism into the mainstream protestant Churches. But sooner or later, Pentecostal lifestyles crept into these Churches through the efforts of the Charismatic movements. Although, most mainline Churches initially seem to repudiate the intrusion of Pentecostalism into their midst but it gradually finds reception among the people.

Typologies of Pentecostalism in Igboland

At this juncture, it is very imperative to offer a synthesis of the various facets or branches of Pentecostalism in Igboland, in order to deepen our understanding of the Pentecostal Christianity. This is an ecclesiological re-elaboration of the typology of Christian groups in Igboland by Gaiya, where he identified Sunday worshippers and Sabbath worshippers as Churches that can serve as a typology of independent Churches and miracles, prosperity, faith and holiness groups as typology of Pentecostalism in the country. He built his typology around the classical Reformation themes of Sola Scriptura and Scriptura et Traditions. The classification is based on his approach since it offers us a clue to the historical evolution of Igbo Christendom, the appropriation and metamorphosis of evangelical Protestantism in the country.

One of the notable Pentecostal Churches in Igboland today is the Grace of God Mission International. It is Christian organization and one of the largest indigenous missions in Igboland as well as in Nigeria. It sometimes identifies with a spiritual legacy and a juxtapose growth process like that of classical African instituted Churches and a later day Pentecostal Churches like the Assemblies of God Church. The founding members of the Grace of God Mission International were one of the earliest Christian leaders in Igboland to witness restraints on their evangelistic missions, both by the local authorities and foreign missions. In that early 1930s, during the period of economic turmoil the new mission organized and conducted revivals that attracted a wide audience and these solidified the place of the Church in the Igholand. The revival of late 1930s and of early 1940s resulted in a

large conversion of many Igbo people to Christianity and many people abandoned traditional religion and joined them. Most of the reasons for the separations are doctrinal as we can see in the case of the Aladura and other independent missions.

Although, different in origin and organization from the Grace of God Mission, these other Pentecostal missions have some commonalities. The Grace of God Mission, like other Pentecostal Churches have the set of beliefs and patterns on which they operate. They believe in the authority of the Bible. The Bible to them is the final authority in whatever you want to know about the almighty God. The Bible is to these groups all sufficient rules for faith and practice. This statement of fundamental truth is intended as the basis of fellowship among these Pentecostal missions. There was no claim that the Bible contains all truth, but only that it covers their present need as to some fundamental matters. These bodies accept that the Bible is their all-sufficient rule for faith and belief.

Truth is intended as a basis of fellowship among them. The human phraseology in some statements are neither inspired nor contended for, but the truth set forth is held to be essential to a full gospel ministry. They believe that the Bible covers our present needs as to the fundamental matters of Christian faith. These groups ideally believe that both the Old and New Testaments are virtually inspired of God and are the revelation of God to man. It is an infallible and authoritative rule of faith. Pentecostals mean that special divine influence on the mind of the writers of the Bible, in virtue of which their production apart from errors in translations and when rightly interpreted together constitute an infallible rule of faith and practice.

Paul said to Timothy, "all scripture is given by inspiration of God and it is profitable for direction, for report, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good workers"⁸ (II Tim 3: 16). The briefest reasons why the Grace of God Mission and some other Pentecostal missions accept the full inspiration of the Bible are as follows:

- i. Jesus gave the Old Testament His full support. He accepted it as the infallible word of God. As He says, verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot of my word shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled (Matthew 5: 18).
- ii. The Bible is the product of one mastermind sixty-six books, by about forty different authors. Those authors were living at different places and environments during a period of 1600 years. Each one without being aware of it, contributing his essential part to make one whole, each adding to and making clear, but never contradicting what the rest wrote.

These indigenous Pentecostal missions together with the Grace of God Mission, through the Bible revelation have only one way of salvation. This is in agreement with Jesus teaching that says, "I am the way, the truth and life, no body cometh unto my father except by me"⁹ (John 14:6). To them God alone can show man the way to forgiveness and cleansing. This assurance of salvation is not based on feeling. They are based on these three things (a) The word of God (b) The witness of the Holy Spirit (c) The changed life of the individual. The groups also hold on the followings their set of beliefs of immersion baptism. The gifts of Grace of God Mission was also described as one of the new religious movements of this time. But looking into it properly will enable one to see that it is true that the group is a contemporary of these new Pentecostal Churches, but in practice and doctrines the Church is quite different especially in the areas of doctrine, organization, approach to the Bible interpretation etc. In the Grace of God Mission the Bible is given the most serious attention. It was discovered that in most of these new found faiths, much attention is given to the prophecy, healing and working of miracles. The Grace of God Mission International believe in all these things like prophecy, gifts, speaking in tongues, working of miracles, but the emphasis is not much on all these phenomena.

Impact of Pentecostalism in Igboland

The boom of Pentecostalism introduced into Igboland a spirituality that was not fostered by the initial western missionaries. No wonder Obaje observed that "it inaugurated an approach to faith and ecclesial polity that is glaringly different from the initial practices of the mainline churches. In Igboland, all the denominations are experiencing renewal. Prayer and fasting and signs and wonders of healing and deliverance are common, Pentecostalism has awakened a tremendous yearning for a primal spirituality in the Igbo community. The Pentecostal spirituality was highly welcomed among the poor of our society, hence by the majority, since most Igbo Christians then, were poor economically. This impetus finds support and tremendous enthusiasm among Christians of various denominations and ecclesial affinity, since it addresses the raw spiritual desire of man. The boom of Pentecostalism in the mainline Churches is an invitation to Churches to reconsider their Christian testimony and proclamation of Jesus Christ as the Saviour and Redeemer of all people. The charismatic renewal in various Churches and general quest for an effective spirituality among Christians of all denominations are the effects of Pentecostalism.

The penetration of Pentecostal spirituality into the mainline Churches constitutes a theological and ecclesiological obstacle for many theologians. Nevertheless, it is undisputable that Pentecostal experience and spirituality have come to stay in most Churches in Igboland today. The presence and the realness of the divine power is intrinsic to African worldview. The question of the cessation of charisma and miracles, the divine that would not intervene in the living situation and in everydayness of the people was only a bitter theological pill that many Africans were advised to swallow but only to hang at their throats. The outburst of charismatic experience according to Adiele, who said that in the historic Churches of the West and its diffusion to Africa was seen as the divine way of proving the western theology of mechanistic world, where God is a hidden and silent observer, to be an existential unbelief of some western missionaries”¹¹.

Therefore, charismatic experiences in the mainlines Churches as manifestation of spiritual gifts and evident power of the Holy Spirit are being lived and seen as normal Christian life and not as the expression of particular movement. This explains why charismatic Christianity soon flourished in almost all historic Churches in Igboland. You do not need to know the theology of baptism in the Holy Spirit to be healed by God and to become instrument of healing to others. One does not need to belong to Pentecostal Churches to learn how to develop voluptuous praise of God. It is not Pentecostalism that endows one with the capacity to dance before the awesome presence of the Lord. Pentecostalism does not introduce visions and dreams; they are available wherever the living God is present. In short, the charismatic experience is the disentangling of Christianity from the western-existential and pastoral unbelief and making Christ what He really is: the power of God to save in time and in eternity.

In today’s Christian scenario in Igboland, it is almost impossible to imagine an authentic minister of God devoid of spiritual gifts. Charismatic spirituality in Igbo mainline Churches is better described as an appraisal of an in-depth religious consciousness, or as an un-concealment of the divine and an in-breaking of the fundamental religious expectations among the people. Pentecostalism has eaten deep into the religious consciousness of the contemporary Igbo society and its influences and repercussions can be observed across religious strata in the country. Thus, we are moving into a new religious culture developing from the contemporary Pentecostalism. The followings are some of the positive and negative effects of Pentecostalism on the contemporary Igboland Christianity. These are nevertheless, exclusive to the Igboland situation, they could be noted wherever the Pentecostal spirituality is fostered. Moreover, they are not manufactured by or introduced ex nihilo, by the Pentecostals. They only helped the people to appreciate and give due attention to these dimensions or aspects of the Christian faith. The African context make them interesting and desirable in the Churches. These should be encouraged for an effective Christian witness today.

Holy Bible

Pentecostalism has reawakened a general desire and love for the Bible as the written word of God and as a perennial document of authentic Christian moral life. Many Christians are nowadays taking the Bible seriously and it is no longer considered as a book meant for the clergy. There are many Bible study groups in the mainline Churches in Igboland and some of them are operating vital ecclesial ministries. For instance, Roman Catholics are finding biblical support for much of the presupposed doctrinal and devotional practices of the Church. It is now common to hear from mainline Churches: the Bible says and many biblical passages are becoming a regular prayer motives for many Christians. This awakened interest in the Bible is helping people to realize that prayer is not a monologue but a dialogue between God and his children. The Bible remains an authoritative word of God and it is through the Bible that God dialogues with a believer.

Gospel Music

Religious music has witnessed a remarkable innovation since the outburst of Pentecostalism. Many people had discovered a new dimension of being a Christian through the so-called gospel music. The fluidity of Pentecostal rhyme and rhythm has made it easy for people to sing and play the same tune in various languages and in diverse cultural ambiances. Pentecostal music is homogenizing the cultural spectrum of the country. The youths of various ethnic background and religious affiliations can now come together to sing and enjoy a common religious tune. Music is a central part of African culture and especially in African religious culture. Pentecostalism has really fostered the flourishing of African rhythm in Christian worship, making the Church more at home in the African soul. The presence of Pentecostal music and accompaniments has helped many young Igbo people to realize that religious services can be pleasurable and has created a common identity for people of various denominations and ethnics in the one big family of God. Moreover, Pentecostal music has reawakened the religious life of the people. Many Churches are now giving attention to the formation and training of choristers in the Church. Resources are being allotted for the provision of a state of art musical instruments as singing and dancing is becoming an integral part of the liturgy. Pentecostalism has led to the integration of African music into Christian worship in a very significance manner and style.

At first, the encounter between Christianity and Igbo traditional religion was marked by antagonism. However, over time, the Christian community began to assimilate some elements of Igbo culture into its worship. Chukwu asserts that “the Igbo had (and have) peculiar music style which has not only survived Christian influence, but has also been incorporated as a part of Christian Church worship”¹².

Spiritual Prayer Life

There is no doubt that Pentecostalism has awakened in Igboland an eagerness for spiritual life in the secular world and a desire for an experiential communion with God in prayers. People are now giving serious attention to their prayer life. There is a noticeable quest for a spirituality based on a personal relationship with the Lord. The mainline Churches have manifested a love for private eucharistic adoration. Pentecostalism is noted for encouraging a spirituality that abhors confinement and standardization, while provoking an intimate experience of the Holy Spirit. Many Igbo people are now after a spirituality that is manifested in power, since an in-breaking of the divine in the ordinary is a proof of the validity and authenticity of a religious life of an individual. In this context, People are looking for men of God and Spiritual masters and the results their encounter with these men of God will yield for them. To this end, religious pragmatism is becoming a feature of spirituality and prayer.

Preaching-Proclamation-Teaching

One of the outstanding impacts of Pentecostalism is a general interest in the preaching, proclamation and teaching of the Christian faith in Igboland by the mainline Churches. There is an earnest effort to expound the Christian faith and moral, which has led to much evangelistic renewal across Churches. The attention that is given to the Bible by the Pentecostals as the sole authoritative source of preaching the good news and of teaching the Christian faith and morals have provoked theologians and pastors of the mainline Churches to give a new zeal to the ministry of the Word. This zeal for evangelization has led to the incorporation of courses in evangelization methods and techniques of evangelization - are becoming more conspicuous in the curriculum of seminaries and theological faculties in the country.

Many bishops and priests are not teaching the people what they are supposed to know about God and His Word. They do not give the faithful the needed understanding that the Eucharist is word celebrated; that it is the word of God that gives meaning and significance to the sacraments. This desire for a renewed commitment to the preaching and teaching of the Christian faith is a contribution of Pentecostalism. Many preachers in the mainline Churches were educated and sophisticated salesmen in possession of the best products in the market, but woefully lacking in skills and disastrously unable to market their products. It is the success of the Pentecostals that brought this observation to limelight and in the last few years, the situation is fast changing and the pulpits in the mainline Churches are becoming fountain of enrichment and nourishment for the faithful.

Liturgy-Worship

Liturgy deals with the way people worship God. Pentecostals take worship seriously and allow it to penetrate and influence their lives. Indeed, for the Pentecostals, worship is a 24-hour-a-day, seven-days-a-week experience of God. The Pentecostals' attention to worship and vibrancy of Pentecostal celebrations have led to a change of attitude towards liturgical celebrations in the mainline Churches. The faithful are responding to the call for active participation at the liturgical functions due to the stimulus from the Pentecostal Churches. The guiding principles for preparing for any liturgical function are built around the experience of the people and not simply in conformity to a foreign style of worship. Many Nigerian Christians generally welcome the Pentecostal styles of worship, since this seems to respond to African religious sentiments. It is not long since the Catholic Church introduced into her liturgy the singing of choruses, playing of local instruments, clapping of hands and dancing. Hitherto “it was forbidden by an unwritten law to do these things.

The Church was supposed to be as quiet as possible so that one would not distract the presence of God in the Spirit”¹³. It is now taken for granted that some of these basic anthropological dispositions of Africans could become useful and powerful tools for glorifying God and edifying a worshipping community. The mainline Churches are now taking cue from the Pentecostal Churches, women for instance are now assuming responsibility at public worship in the mainline Churches. Much function that does not require the character of ordination are now taken up readily by women at liturgical functions. This has given a unique touch to the liturgical assembly, where nobody is no more considered as a-pious spectator at the sacred drama. Pentecostalism has attempted to offer women individuation and identity in the household of God, to embellish their authentic religious endowments. This inspiration is being taken over by the mainline Churches in Nigeria.

Lay Participation

Closely associated to the empowerment of women at the liturgical functions, is a general commitment of the laity to their Christian callings. The era when the Church was the exclusive affairs of the clergy is fast coming to an end. The platform of this awareness and vivification in the realization that there is no sector of the people of God that is endowed with the monopoly of the spiritual gifts. The Church grows where there are manifestations of spiritual gifts, whether among the laity or the clergy, for the good of the whole community. Now, there is awareness that there is one Spirit but many gifts (1Cor. 12: 1-13). Each gift is meant for the good of the whole community and it is therefore an affront to the Holy Spirit, if any member of the community refuses to make his or her charismatic endowments available to the community.

The above Pentecostal consciousness had really encouraged many faithful in the mainline Churches to embark upon a ministry in their local community and beyond. We are now witnessing a flourishing of charismas (whether ordinary or extraordinary) in the Churches. It is the responsibility of every Christian to use his charismas for the building up of the Church, since all are members of the Body of Christ. It is only in doing this that we bring glory and honour to the body of Christ of which we are members by virtue of our baptism and participation in the Holy Spirit. There is now a general disposition among the clergy to recognize and foster charismas among the lay faithful and to give them a proper space for growth and service in the Church.

Clerical and Lay Formation

The onslaught of Pentecostalism had called the mainline Churches to review the programmed of formation of their pastors, in order to respond effectively, to the present situation in the Igboland. And apart from the ministerial training in the seminaries and theological faculties, they have various denititional and inner denominational centers for training and formation of the faithful either for evangelical works or for their general Christian formation. Many priests, and lay faithful were being trained as evangelists, well equipped to respond to the religious challenges of the moment. These schools are now common in Igboland, offering training in evangelization and ministry to those who might not afford professional theological formation.

Use of Mass Media

Another aspect of this response is the development of communication departments in various mainline Churches, to inform the public about the works of salvation. Many bishops and priests are now regular guests in television and radio stations, in their attempt to carry the gospel beyond the pulpit. Churches programmes and spiritual activities are given wider publicity in the mass media. The Pentecostals had encouraged the use of mass media for religious programmes and this was fast becoming normal for the mainline Churches in Igboland.

No wonder Dan Chukwu asserts that another innovation is the popularization of the electronic media as a means of preaching. He stressed that, "in the South-East zone of Nigeria, the Grace of God mission was among the Pentecostal Churches that took the lead in the use of radio/television as a way of disseminating gospel messages to the masses"¹⁴

Ecclesial Consciousness

Pentecostalism has really influenced the ecclesial consciousness of many Christians and their identification with their Churches is becoming very strong. The Spirit is not just gathering people into a faceless mass, but into an organised Body of Christ. There is much personal solidarity with a local Christian community now. My Church is becoming a popular slogan among Christians. Expressions such as these are commonly used nowadays, "there is function my Chareth's come and worship with me in my Church", "my Church does not discriminate", there is fasting in my Church today", "my Church is growing because Jesus is the Lord in my Church is having her annual harvest and I must be there and similar ones". These indicate their sense of involvement and commitment to their worshipping community

This ecclesial solidarity is now influencing the moral life of people in the society, since they believe that their actions or inactions will be attributed to their Churches. "There is a kind of spontaneous desire for an adequate ethical life, in order to meet up with the ethical standard of their Churches among committed Christians"¹⁵. Many are now being cautious about their life style because they are aware that they are being watched. A priest is not going to cover his character with cassock or an establishment coat. People are demanding to know how their priests or pastors are living. This demands holiness and proper moral life, both from the sanctuary and the pew. The Pentecostals teaching of born-again has much impact on the mainline Churches, since every authentic Christian is expected to live a new life in Christ and to be guided by the Spirit. Since there is no Church that is contrary to holiness and righteousness of her members, many are compelled by their ecclesial consciousness to demonstrate an acceptable Christian moral standard in their public life, at least so that they do not tarnish the image of their Church.

Church Support Practice (Tithing)

The Pentecostal Churches are often indigenous congregations and as such there are no mother Churches or funding agencies for their financing and sustenance. The support of the Church rests solely on the local members. The commonly adopted means of supporting the Church is tithing. The biblical practice of tithing is generally accepted by members, even when it is very demanding on the individuals. This approach has proven to be useful and effective for the survival of Pentecostal Churches in Igboland. Many Christians in the mainline Churches are realizing the spiritual usefulness of tithing and are therefore, paying their tithes to support Churches. Some bishops are devising tithing as a tactic, for calling the laity, to their responsibility of providing for the material needs of the Church. The response from the faithful of the mainline Churches, who didn't consider tithing, as an essential part of religious practices, is very positive. Many are challenged by the Pentecostals to assign ten percent of their monthly income, for the support of their Churches, while they still continue with their voluntary donations and offering to God.

Devotional Practices

Pentecostalism is challenging some of the Churches traditional pious practices, which are ineffective for meeting the spiritual needs of today. Members of the mainline Churches are incorporating from the Pentecostals, new religious practices or devotions that seem to respond pragmatically to their religious and spiritual necessities. The general result is a kind of syncretistic devotions by many Christians, in their search for a devotion that works. One of the religious practices in Pentecostalism that has come to stay is speaking in tongues. Even though some mainline Christians do not allow speaking in tongues in their public liturgy, it is becoming a common phenomenon in organized paraliturgical functions of various Churches. There are priests and ministers who now openly encourage their members to pray in tongues even at liturgical celebrations. Some manifestations associated with the experience of the Spirit are now common among mainline Churches both at public and private levels. Another Pentecostal practice that is incorporated by many mainline Christians is voluptuous praise. Priests and pastors now urge the faithful to praise the Lord and dancing before the Lord is fast becoming a pious practice. A selective incorporation of the authentic African and universal Judeo-Christian values into private and liturgical life of the people through the influence of Pentecostalism and New Religious Movements are considered as a meaningful style of inculturation.

Decline of the Igbo Culture of Brotherhood

Historically, the Igbo society and culture has always been characterized by strong brotherhood, which largely manifest in form of "Umunna" and age grades. But the emergence and subsequent growth of Pentecostalism has drastically degraded this culture of oneness. According to Ukpong, "this situation could be linked directly to mode of operation of most of these Pentecostal churches. For instance, members of a particular congregation refer to one another as "brother" and "sister"¹⁶. They are also known to provide brotherly assistance to one another, such as visitation of the sick and helping out in securing paid jobs. Ordinarily, this communal life, which is very much similar to those of the early Christians, is quite a good thing. It is actually in line with the communalism and togetherness of the Igbo society.

However, although the reawakening of the ancient Christian life is quite a recommendable development, the way and manner it is being practiced in the society exposed many Pentecostal Churches to the risk of over-fraternalization, religious nepotism and spiritual ethnicity in Igboland. But most importantly, such development is having detrimental impact on the Igbo "Umunna" and age grades traditional systems. For instance, the over-fraternalization of many Pentecostal churches, which is unchristian, prompts some church members to regard those that do not belong to their own denomination as strangers and sinners, including family members and relatives. Thus, they tend to live away from world of sinners, thereby shunning the traditional umunna and age grade systems. This postulation was also confirmed by Okpaleke and Nwadiakor, who noted "that the proliferation of Pentecostal churches has led to the emergence of an entirely new means of social identity in the Igbo society"¹⁷. The authors further pointed out that this force of solidarity and fraternity among members of the Pentecostal churches prevent them from uniting with wider Igbo society. This argument was also supported by Ekwuru who in his words lamented that:

Certainly, "in these few decades, a lot of socio-cultural changes have taken place. Some of them have been observed to be too sudden, total and devastating, while others happened so gradual but equally corrosive in their cultural impact"¹⁸. Most of the cultural forms and modes that constituted the nucleus of the traditional communal life have been observed to have vanished. The pristine social network that promoted brotherly love within the kinship structure of extended family system has been severed and dismembered. The village commune of the political structure that guaranteed a type of republican form of democratization has been deformed and repudiated.

In their study, Ubaku and Ugwuja observed that “many Pentecostal churches are clearly encouraging their members to get rid of every type of cultural affinities”¹⁹. They specifically gave an instance of the Believers Love World, who according to them, encourage members to always perceive themselves as citizens of Zion. Of course, one obvious requirement for such perception is to lose all forms of attachment to ethnicities. This form of life style has dire consequences for the Igbo society generally. It is actually among the main factors that led to the disconnection and estrangement of members from their immediate communities. It also explains the relentless decline of the Igbo culture and language

Pentecostalism as one consequence of declining state of the Igbo Language. Language; as an essential aspect of culture is one of the main identities of any group of people. Similarly, Odinye described language as “an ethnic identity that ought to be handled seriously because; any society that loses its language has unarguably lost its identity”²⁰. Nwadike described language “as a key to the people’s heart, which is also important for communication as well as national development”²¹. The above postulations clearly revealed the important role of language in today’s modern world. Unfortunately, the Igbo language in recent years has continuously been on the decline. This is extremely bad as the Igbo language is one cultural legacy bequeathed on the Igbo people as part of their identity. But this identity is obviously on the verge of collapsing due to neglect and persistent disuse by the Igbo people themselves. Ogwudile decries this bad habit and further avers that:

“The Igbo language is supposed to be the most powerful tool to which Igbo indigenes think, create, aspire, desire, feel and express their enlarged mental horizon and fulfill that which man is capable of in his language”²². Igbo people, as a race, are supposed to be very proud of their language, but the reverse is the case. It is imperative to note that this bad habit of neglecting Igbo language is being facilitated by a number of factors. In their study, Ubaku and Ugwuja identified the activities of many new generation Pentecostal churches as among the factors that promotes the decline of Igbo language. In their words, “Pentecostalism has substantially sub standardized the Igbo language”²³. This postulation is prompted by the fact that the Igbo language hardly plays any roles in the services conducted by these churches. According to Ubaku and Ugwuja, some Pentecostal churches openly declared Igbo language as being antithetical to progress.

Unfortunately, such declaration has profound impact on the members’ mentality, as it prompts them to view the Igbo language as being unproductive. Some Pentecostal pastors that discourage the use of Igbo language in their services argue that the use of local languages may result to the division of the congregation along ethnic lines. But in reality, this argument holds no water as demonstrated in Yoruba land, where many Pentecostal Churches use Yoruba interpreters in their services. In Igboland, it is only the mainline churches like Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Communion and Methodist Mission that fully use Igbo language in their services. In Igbo towns where there is high tendency of having residents of other ethnic origin, these churches still have separate Igbo and English services for their members.

Additionally, Ubaku and Ugwuja also observe an obvious de-accentuation of the use of indigenous names for newly converts. For instance, one of the interviewees that participated in the study admitted that “after joining Covenant Peoples Assembly, he had to change his name from Obumneme Omemgboji to Victor Daniels”²⁴. This practice could be attributed to the general perception that man’s destiny could be influenced by his or her names. Thus, it is quite common to see members of the Pentecostal churches giving their children such names like Favour, Success, Miracle, Divine etc. But ironically, such practice is not so common in the Yoruba land, where the identities of the members are not only represented adequately, but also promoted. As an increasing number of the Igbo people continue to alienate from the local language, it is also becoming clear that the language is at the great danger of extinction.

Conclusion

From the deductions above, it can be explained that Pentecostalism was never a force to be reckoned with in Igboland before and immediately after Nigerian Independence. Reasons are that the mainline Churches, particularly the Catholics, Anglicans and the Methodists seemed to have diligently and infectiously prided and guarded their members so securely that none of them had time to consider choice of denouncing their faith for another Christian denomination. In actuality, the mainline Churches had already colonized the Igboland religious space among themselves to the extent that when the Pentecostal Churches began to appear, they had little or no space for them in the religious life of the Igbo people. A greater setback was the inability of the Pentecostal at that early stage to muster enough financial muscle to embark on aggressive educational programs like the mainline Churches for effective evangelization.

However, it was the Nigeria-Biafra War that prepared the scenario of Pentecostal growth in Igboland. After the war, the number of Pentecostal Churches in Igboland began to increase and blossomed. Pentecostalism is a major religious and social movement that has penetrated all strata of Igbo society such as education, business,

health, social media and social development. It is now accepted that the Christian message can easily be made to conform to the cultural milieu and intellectual conviction of the people. However, it needs a prayerful and honest disposition to assess whether Pentecostalism is a blessing to Igboland and the mainline Churches. Waking the Church from her Ivory tower and imperial romance to the reality of her mission as a spiritual entity whose sole purpose and aim is to proclaim and continue the mission of Jesus Christ of Nazareth in season and out of season summarises the Pentecostal movement across Igboland.

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