

THE INTRIGUING AGGRANDIZEMENT OF CYBER RELIGION IN NIGERIA: 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION FORETELLING AND FORTHTELLING

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Abstract

Empirical evidence based on the experiences shows that religion is seemingly becoming a dispersant than glue in Nigeria. This assertion is informed by the fact that some religious leaders with significant cyber followership employ intrigues in the use of religion for their personal aggrandizement. In recent times, politicians have found ways of cyber manipulation of religion through the recruitment of some religious leaders in their favour at the expense of common good. Cyber religion being used by both politicians and religious leaders has become a divisive portent against the citizens. Using analytical research method, it is discovered that Nigeria is deeply divided on religious lines – Muslims versus Christians and Christians against Christians perpetrated by unscrupulous religious and political leaders for personal gains. The intriguing use of cyber religion for personal aggrandizement exposes the battle of greed against creed. The result of this misuse of cyber religion is endemic corruption, religious perfidy, spiritual stagnation, national division and stunted economic growth. The paper concludes with a recommendation that well meaning Nigerians should unite against the misuse of cyber religion in order to restore the dignity and piety of religion.

Keywords: Cyber-Religion, Nigeria, Aggrandizement, Christians, and Muslims

Introduction

Religion is supposed to be a glue rather than a dispersant. But for all intents and purposes, but recent happenings, make it seems more like a dispersant than a glue in Nigeria. This assertion is informed by how religion is used in Nigeria for divisive purposes. It is in the light of the foregoing that this paper aims at examining the litany of prophecies that are churned out by religious leaders in the country and assess whether the multivariant prophecies are from the same God. The paper argues that some of these prophecies and utterances do not edify

the faithful but rather divide them as some perceive ethnic motivations and sentiments in the oracles.

This paper adopts analytical research method. This particular kind of research calls for using critical thinking abilities and assessing data and information (Aggarwal 2) pertinent to the project at hand in this case the use of religion in cyberspaces by religious leaders for personal aggrandizement. Satter asserts that “the goal of analytical research is to develop new ideas that are more believable by combining numerous minute details” (Satter 2). Online sources like journals, news outlets, and digital platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, among others are utilized and critically analyzed.

Nigeria is multi-ethnic as well as multi-religious. Three major religions practiced in the country are African Traditional Religion (ATR), Christianity and Islam. Christianity and Islam are the two that have profound influence on every facet of life in Nigeria. Their influence on politics is of colossal magnitude. The multiplicity of Nigeria presents a complex diversity that is mostly exploited by the politicians and those with enormous influence like religious leaders. When you hear a member of the elite talking about national interest, this interest is calculated based on ethnicity and religious affinities.

Given the nature of polity in Nigeria, it is plausible to say that religion has been politicized and politics has been *religionized* in Nigeria with a significant appeal to ethnic chauvinism. It is in the light of this that one hears people describe others as religious or ethnic bigots. This bigotry breeds religious intolerance as argued by Ikechi-Ekpendu *et al*.

Since independence, Nigeria has witnessed a variety of religious disturbances some of which have threatened the existence of the country as a nation. There are always palpable fears at the slightest provocation of inter-religious skirmishes especially in the northern parts of Nigeria. The persistence of this phenomenon has become source of worry for most Nigerians (Ikechi-Ekpendu *et al* 3).

For Eleagu, this reason is the justification for the Christian faith, through the church, should actively participate in politics. He advocated that the church as a collectivity has interests. Christianity as a faith, with all the buffeting missiles (2 Timothy 4:1-4), should come out clearly and seek to possess the Christian possession (Joshua 1:11). The church should be free to command votes and extract promises from competing candidates in order to ensure, at least, the continued secularity of the entity called Nigeria as well as maintain earthly

relevance while upholding heavenly consciousness. The wanton religious killings and indiscriminate rape of innocent women and girls by Fulani herdsmen in the southern part of Nigeria, where they are strangers, will abate if Christian leadership moves from reacting through press releases to such ugly incidents to angling for positions of reasonable power in the polity (Eleagu 12).

Corroborating this, Salihu asserted that the politicization of religion has fuelled religious conflicts and violence, leading to loss of lives and properties. The Boko Haram insurgency, which began in 2009, is an example of the consequences of religious extremism in Nigeria. Another negative consequence of involving religion in Nigeria's politics is the erosion of the country's secularism. Nigeria is a secular state, but the involvement of religion in politics has led to the blurring of lines between religion and state. This has resulted in the adoption of policies that favour one religion over the other and the exclusion of minorities from political processes (Salihu 2; see also Rufai 1).

Salihu, however, went on to argue to the contrary that religion should be involved with politics because it has some positive consequences namely that it teaches and instils discipline and morality into politics in addition to other factors.

One of the positive consequences of involving religion in Nigeria's politics is the promotion of moral values. Religion teaches moral values such as honesty, integrity, and justice, which are crucial for a stable and just society. Religious leaders can use their platforms to advocate for these values and hold politicians accountable for their actions. Additionally, religion can inspire people to participate in politics and contribute to the development of their communities (2).

Were this to be the main reason of politicizing religion in Nigeria that could have been a laudable thing to do? But what obtains is the opposite as Salihu himself posited *inter alia*:

...the involvement of religion in politics has resulted in the emergence of religious leaders as political power brokers. This has led to the entrenchment of corruption in the political system, as religious leaders often use their positions to secure political appointments and contracts for their followers (2).

In their grand aggrandizement, some of these religious leaders use their positions and platforms to corner these contracts for themselves. Few years ago, during the administration of Goodluck Jonathan, the then Christian Association

of Nigeria (CAN) chairman, Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor, was in the news for a contract scandal. It was alleged that he used his private jet for arms purchase and money laundering in South Africa. This is not limited to Christianity alone. This is why most of those religious leaders that launder the image of politicians are doing so for the gains that will follow.

Orogun and Pillay contextualized their research of the African Neo-Pentecostal Churches (ANPC) and their interaction with Digital Technology (DT) to before and after Covid-19 pandemic. Their focus was on investigating how the ANPC interacts with DT to improve missional work and the possible implications of doing so in the last 15 years. Using Albert Humphrey's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) framework to analyse the implications of the interaction, they opined that the strengths and opportunities of digital interaction such as the wider and easier reach of audience, among others are helpful in missional assignments. They concluded that the lesson from the findings is that 'techno church' practices come with gains (Orogun and Pillay 1). They nestled these gains under economic benefits such as "financial rewards from offerings" and "advertisements" and the promotion of "the abuse of prosperity gospel via financial scams" (Orogun and Pillay 5-6).

Chiluwa's work "Online Religion in Nigeria: The Internet Church and Cyber Miracles" focuses on the susceptibility of cyber church attendees to deception and cyber miracle and their divided loyalty to the offline church. While he lauds the internet church and cyber miracles indicating that God has also gone online, he laments that there are fears that "some members might be deceived by 'false prophets' and 'false teachings' resulting from random online worship" (14).

From the reviewed literature, it can be observed that there is a consensus that cyber religion in Nigeria has advantages and disadvantages. As a whole, it is discovered that religion if not properly harnessed, could be a weapon that is capable of unleashing crisis on the people. In addition to this, it can be used as a tool or means for fraudulent gains by unscrupulous religious leaders. This is true of cyber religion. While scholars discuss this in general terms, this paper focuses on the use of cyber religion for the personal gains of the users at the expense of the image of God and the church. Though the paper does not focus solely on Christianity, its concern is on the church leaders who churned out divergent prophecies in support of various presidential candidates in the 2023 general elections. What is intriguing about this is how all of them cited God as the

authority for their fore-telling. The major question to be answered is, ‘can God counter or contradict himself?

Definition of Terms

For the sake of clarity, the following terms are defined especially as they relate to the fulcrum of this paper.

Religion

There are several definitions of religion. However, this paper chooses few of them for consideration. Paul Tillich defines religion as “the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, a concern which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary, and a concern that in itself provides the answer to the question of the meaning of our existence.” For Émile Durkeim, “A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.” Stephen L. Carter explained that “When I refer to religion, I will have in mind a tradition of group worship (as against individual metaphysic) that presupposes the existence of a sentience beyond the human and capable of acting outside of the observed principles and limits of natural science, and further, a tradition that makes demands of some kind on its adherents.” E.B. Tylor averred: “It seems best. . . simply to claim as a minimum definition of Religion the belief in Spiritual Beings.”

Perceptions of scholars about religion vary. PaulIkechukwu and Clara sampled the different perceptions of scholars on religion as adapted here: Lucretius said *Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum* (such where the lengths) of wickedness to which religion could persuade human nature to go. In the same vein, Voltaire insisted “crush that monster, religion and set western man’s spirit free for pursuing this glorious enterprise of raising his culture to Olympian heights.” For these scholars and those of their ilk, religion is a barrier to human self-actualization. There is no doubt that religion can be seen in this light when it has been turned into an ideological tool or else, why did Karl Marx see it as the opium of the people. A palliative used by the leaders to hold the masses in check. In the hand of a villain, religion can be a cog in the wheel of progress and massaging of the ego and dehumanization of the people, while in the hand of a “saint” it becomes an instrument for humanization (PaulIkechukwu and Clara 1-2).

Politics

Politics is derived from the Greek root *polis* meaning city state. Implicitly is the idea of governance in the word *polis*. For Onyekpe, “politics is about the control and exercise of power.” Madu sees it as “an integral feature of man’s social existence and interaction.” In the understanding of Ejizu, it is a dynamic process whereby human and other human resources are managed, directed after due mobilization to ensure the enforcement of public policy and decision in the bid to regulate social order. Some scholars use the term politics in a congruous sense: the struggle for power and the actual exercise of authority and power. Broadly speaking, politics covers every phase and aspect of life in society, for it is essentially about governance (PaulIkechukwu and Clara 2).

2023 Presidential Election: Political Parties and Aspirants

Nigeria operates a multi political party system. About eighteen of them sponsored presidential candidates at the eve of the 2023 presidential elections. However, for the focus of this paper, only three namely: All Progressives Congress (APC), Labour Party (LP), and People’s Democratic Party (PDP) are discussed. The choice of these political parties is because they were the major three political parties with a considerable national spread and appeal. This segment briefly discusses the ethnic and religious affiliations of candidates of these political parties and how it shaped political discourses and election fortune or misfortune.

All Progressives Congress (APC)

The candidates that contested on the platform of the APC were Mr. Bola Ahmed Tinubu and Shettima as presidential and vice presidential candidates respectively. By religion, both are Muslims. By ethnicity, Tinubu is Yoruba from the South West while Shettima is Kanuri from the North East. Their same faith brought a lot of controversies and excited significant conversation across board. Some citizens accused the APC of religious insensitivity for flying a Muslim-Muslim ticket considering the multi-religious nature of the country. For this was a deliberate effort to marginalize the Christians of the country and by so doing pass a subtle message that Nigeria is predominantly a Muslim country. But for the political party and the candidates, the calculations were not about placating Christians but to win the elections. Having a southern Yoruba Muslim contesting with a core northern Muslim was a sure bet for winning the election. Thus, religion and ethnicity were thrown in the mix for the win not for demographics

balance. As will be seeing in the next segment, the Muslims saw this as a bragging right that Islam controls Nigeria. The Christians, in some quarters, view it as a death knell to anything Christianity should the ticket sail through to Aso Rock.

Labour Party (LP)

The Labour Party sponsored Mr. Peter Obi, a South-eastern Igbo Christian as the presidential candidate with Senator Yusuf Ahmed Datti, a North-western Muslim as the vice presidential candidate. This ticket appealed to mostly youths and those who yearned for freshness in the polity. The appeal was that some Christians, in many instances, saw this ticket as representing the Christian community and the Muslims and as the only sensitive ticket of all. Accordingly, the buzz on the social media and in worship centres, especially Christians, kept the campaigns agog. Others on the other side, like some Muslims, accused the ticket as a religious and ethnic (Igbo ticket) one even as Peter Obi was seen attending church programmes all over the country even though Tinubu also upped his attendance for *Juma'at* prayers. The intrigues were that Mr. Obi was in cahoots with some Christian leaders like Bisho David Oyedepo, of the Living Faith. This led to the release of a phone call between Mr. Obi and Bishop Oyedepo, which was derogatorily tagged "Yes Daddy."

People's Democratic Party (PDP)

Alhaji Atiku Abubakar and Dr. Ifeanyi Okowa flew the ticket of the PDP as presidential and vice presidential candidates respectively. Mr. Atiku is a Muslim from the North-east while Dr. Okowa is from the South-south geopolitical zone. The former is a Muslim while the latter is a Christian. Their ticket was believed to be sensitive to the religious calculations in the country. However, ethnicity wise, Mr. Atiku, who is Fulani, was aspiring to take-over from Mr. Muhammadu Buhari, who was the president, and also a Fulani Muslim just like Atiku. Many pundits and commentators opined that it will be a disservice to other ethnic groups if Atiku was allowed to take-over from Buhari after the latter's eight years in power. They argued that power ought to be rotated to the South. It is apparent that Mr. Atiku was banking on his core Northern and Fulani-Muslim appeal for votes with Dr. Okowa doing the same in the South-south.

In all, there were lots of intrigues and heightened sentiments that were exploited by these presidential aspirants. All of them appealed to both ethnic

and religious sentiments to garner votes from the electorate. This forms the crux of discussion in the next segment.

2023 Presidential Election: Discussion of Findings

Nigeria being a very religious country, it is safe to say that it has more religious centres than industries. These religious centres, be they Islam or Christianity, are deeply involved in religious entrepreneurship hence the intriguing use of cyberspaces for religious aggrandizement. During the 2023 presidential election campaign period, some religious leaders went berserk and found foretelling and forth-telling as a lucrative enterprise especially when one of the political parties, the All Progressives Congress (APC) was running a same faith (Muslim-Muslim) ticket. Every religious leader that spoke laid claim to hearing directly from God. Some of them were luckily found to come to pass while others fell flat. In the ensuing paragraphs, this paper samples some of these predictions that substantially betrayed entrepreneurial sentiments and personal aggrandizement as they saturated digital spaces.

The 2023 presidential election threw up an avalanche of prophecies that excited controversies and elicited unimaginable ill-will among the three major religions namely African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam. This strife also extended to ethnic profiling, malicious posts on digital platforms and intolerance that led to the use of ethnic slurs. Some states like Lagos were willing to expel non-Yoruba citizens domiciling in the state. Religious intrigues cast in the mould of political campaigns continued as communities were divided along religious and ethnic affinities. The Muslim-Muslim ticket of the APC helped in compounding the divisions.

Muslim-Muslim Ticket

The same faith presidential ticket of the APC featuring Bola Ahmad Tinubu and Kashim Shettima presented a complex and conflicting scenario to the religious integrity of the country. Given the religious and ethnic multiplicity in Nigeria, it has always been the tradition, in recent time, that those who are vying for national political leadership, especially the presidency, should pick a ticket that represents and reflects the sensitive nature of the country. The APC defied this arrangement or expectations.

What followed was a cocktail of confusion. While some Muslim clerics were joyous about the ticket with some pockets of support from Christians, the

majority of Christians felt consternation and disgust. They expressed dismay at the audacity of the APC to float such an insensitive ticket. To this group, any Christian that supported such a ticket was branded a 'Judas' and an apostate. The same was applicable to Muslims. Many of them saw this as a battle for the supremacy of religions and it all seem that Islam was winning. To this group, any Muslim that was not in support of this ticket was tagged an infidel. This is the implication of Abdulmutallab Muhammad Auwal utterance in a meeting with the Muslim faithful as reported by the Sahara Reporters of 6 Jan 2023.

It was in this scenario that political big game players went into action to make sure this ticket won or does not win. There were commentaries and punditries as much as there were prophecies flying all over the country. All these were a display of religious aggrandizement. To buttress this, for example, on the day of introducing Shettima as the vice presidential candidate of the same faith ticket, there were some Christian clerics that were in attendance to show their solidarity and acceptance of the Muslim-Muslim ticket. This trended on digital media for some weeks as many dismissed those clerics as hired fake bishops. Whether they were fake or not, it is plausible to posit that they were there for the revenue. That said, it is also important to note that some the pastors could card-carrying members of some of these political parties and may be there in solidarity to the party.

El-Rufai Interview

There is religious intolerance when members of the self-acclaimed true religion proclaim in practice that persons they consider to be in error, have no right to live, no right to legitimate political, social and economic amenities unless they renounce their error and be converted to the supposed true religious views and practices (PaulIkechukwu and Clara 5).

The Nasir El-Rufai, the immediate past governor of Kaduna state, interview has nuances that bear far reaching implications implicit in the above quotation. It is more concerning that El-Rufai is not the only Muslim that harbours such thoughts. An Islamic preacher, Abdulmutallab Muhammad Auwal, at a special prayer session organised by Muslim clerics in Kano, saw the Muslim-Muslim ticket of Bola Ahmad Tinubu as the superiority of Islam over all other religions in Nigeria. According to him

This meeting was convened by our group, Islamic Preachers and we've invited about 75 Muslim groups ... The import of today's sitting is to let the clerics and indeed all Muslim leaders know that the Muslim/Muslim ticket is not about mere promises of bringing dividends of democracy like road and infrastructure. This ticket is about the supremacy of Islam. This ticket has honoured Islam. Therefore, we'll honour it with our ballots. Furthermore, remember that a Muslim is always better than an infidel. What more of two Muslims combined? This informed why we undertook to create this awareness and to let all of us know that this Muslim/Muslim ticket is a jihad call to all Muslims (Sahara Reporters 2).

In stark reflection of the above, El-Rufai quipped:

"In politics, all that matters is to win, that's why you go for people who'll vote for you. We've done our survey; the outcome is that we don't need them to win, so we don't have to give them the deputy governor. ... we want to prove that a government where the governor, deputy governor, Secretary to the State Government, Chief of Staff and the finance commissioner are all Muslims. We intend to showcase the justice that's embedded in Islam. ... And by the grace of God, this Muslim/Muslim system would be sustained beyond 20 years" (Sahara Reporters 2-3).

There is an intriguing addition to the report of the same speech per Premium Times:

What we are able to achieve in Kaduna, we've now achieved it on the national level. There is no liar that can say he will do politics of Christianity and win the election. Peter Obi tried it but this is where he is now. We've brought an end to that. They've kept quiet. Ever since Asiwaju emerged, CAN has remained mute. This is how to ensure peace and stability in this country. If we do it again and again everything will be normal. To God, that was what we did (Babangida 3).

That is why such utterances from a person of El-Rufai's status are condemnable, ignoble, inciting and reprehensible especially from a governor of a state where Christian communities are disturbed as the natives are brutally murdered in cold blood while they slept with not a single assailant brought to justice. There is nothing more to this apart from brazen display of religious aggrandizement.

Fake Prophecies – Foretelling and Forth-telling

Foretelling and forth-telling are the basic and primary duties of a prophet. A prophet, in simple terms, is God's oracle mouthpiece. A prophet speaks on God's behalf intimating the people of God's mind and will which may include warnings and cautions. However, given the prevailing religious milieu, where every prophetic utterance is weighted against the revenue that might accrue there from, it is difficult to decipher the true oracles from God.

Waiwai, in her deposition, which is in harmony with the fulcrum of this paper, rightly posited *inter alia*:

Modern religion and its shallow focus on comfort and prosperity have severely distorted the proper application of God's true Word. Prophecy, and its proper function have suffered from tremendous distortion. Rather than exhorting and bringing comfort to people from the revelation of God's will, many claiming to be prophets have degraded the gift to materialistic fortune-telling. Much prophecy of today has become nothing more than repackaged psychic readings, focused on the fortuitous predictions of temporary pleasures (1).

She further illumined that foretelling is the declaration of future events as revealed from the Lord, pertaining especially to the kingdom of God. Forth-telling is to utter forth, declare, a thing which can only be known by divine revelation; declare the divine will, to interpret the purposes of God, or to make known in any way the truth of God which is designed to influence people. It can only be uncovered and revealed through prophets (Waiwai 1-2).

The correct interpretation of God's pure Word has been greatly tainted by conventional Christianity and its superficial emphasis on pleasure and prosperity. Prophecy, as well as its true meaning, has been significantly misunderstood. Many people who claim to be prophets have reduced the gift to worldly fortune-telling rather than empowering and bringing hope to mankind via the understanding of God's purpose. Much of the modern prophecy has deteriorated into commercialized psychic mediums focused on fortuitous predictions of fleeting delight.

The Tribune Online News reported on 24th February, 2023 that the leader of INRI Evangelical Spiritual Church, Primate Elijah Ayodele, prophesied that the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar, will be the next president of Nigeria.

Among these three candidates, Atiku has been given an assignment from God to fix the nation within four years. If God gives Atiku victory in this election, he is to use only four years for this special assignment... I am not saying Atiku will win the election, it's only the people's vote that can determine that but I am only saying what God sent me to say to Nigerians (Arogbonlo 2).

This type of foretelling is saturated in deliberate obfuscation in order to afford the 'prophet' room for deniability. God gave Atiku an assignment yet Atiku will not win? Now that Atiku ended up not winning, the prophet will simply claim that he did not say he was going to win. This is making God to appear like an unserious Being.

Rev. Father Ejike Mbaka, the Spiritual Director of Adoration Ministry Enugu Nigeria (AMEN), had (and may still be having) a running battle with the Labour Party presidential candidate in the 2023 election, Mr. Peter Obi. Father Mbaka denied reports that he prophesied against Peter Obi. Mbaka, who made the denial in a video posted on the ministry's Facebook page, maintained he never spoke against Peter Obi. "After handing over to Fr. Anthony Amadi on Sunday, I started hearing that Fr Mbaka spoke against Peter Obi. I Rev. Fr Mbaka on that Sunday never mentioned Peter not to talk of Obi" (Leadership 2). Hitherto, the priest decried the stingy nature of Mr. Peter Obi and prophesied that it is better to have an old man rule Nigeria than have a stingy young man do so. All his prophecies were based largely on his personal aggrandizement.

The Lord of Hosts Miracle Chapel, Bright Ndibunwa, otherwise known as Brighttheseer. Months before the election, she revealed the identity of the next president of Nigeria. In June, while she prayed to God earnestly to give Nigeria the right leader, the Spirit said to her that leadership is a destiny one comes with:

The spirit said that Alhaji Bola Ahmed Tinubu is born to be a leader of many black people with different languages and cultures, that when his late Biological mom was alive before she took in with his pregnancy, they use to call her 'Tya Oba.' Even when Tinubu was young, seers and spiritualists saw him as a leader... He will win the 2023 election with more than 35 to 40 per cent votes. It is not that I woke up to say what the Lord said to me when he didn't say. My records are there (Ibitoye 2, 3).

Even though Tinubu is declared president, many Nigerians are not convinced that he won the election free and fair. It is believed that he rigged himself into power with 37% of the total votes cast. Even with the rigging, he is so far the only president that took power with less than 50% of votes cast. It makes one wonder how God will allow his choice to rig election for his word to come true rather than make them win with a landslide. This only depicts God as fraudulent and weak.

In another twist and brazen show of religious aggrandizement displayed on cyberspaces, the Punch highlights the ‘hit-and-miss’ prophecies about Tinubu’s inauguration (Tolu-Kolawole 2-6). Needless to say that these conflicting prophecies are as embarrassing as they are insulting to the personality or God’s Being.

The founder of ‘I Reign Christian Ministry’, Feyi Daniels prophesied that Tinubu would win the 2023 presidential elections would not be sworn in on May 29, 2023 because he will be arrested by security agencies. The cleric in a video posted on his YouTube channel said:

About to be sworn-in, that day, everybody that said he (Tinubu) is the next president will be rejoicing and they will be saying, I told you, prophets that don’t see far will start telling you that, didn’t I tell you that Tinubu is the next president? At that event, it looks like a very open ground, like a stadium-like centre, while at that event, military men will come in and they will arrest Tinubu (YouTube Video 19 February 2023).

Tinubu was sworn-in and not arrested as the prophet predicted. The General Overseer of the Champions Royal Assembly, Joshua Iginla, on May 21, 2023, prophesied that nothing will stop Tinubu’s inauguration. He then quickly adds what sounds more like a marketing and branding strategy when he said:

I have never met him before, I have never seen him before. I try to distance myself from politicians. When it comes to the issue of what God spoke to me, I stand my ground. If you have been following my track record from nation to nation like Zambia, Kenya amongst other global prophecies, when God speaks to me, I stick to it. When it comes to the issue of the prophetic and having an understanding of it, I know that’s one thing God has blessed me with (Tolu-Kolawole 3).

This prophecy too, whether or not it came to pass, they are fundamentally informed by the desire of the ‘prophets’ to gain traffic or massive influx to their ministries. In contrast to Iginla’s prophecy, another ‘anointed man of God, Gbujie, in a three-page release issued to newsmen in Enugu, declared the man of God said that Atiku Abubakar might win the presidential election but added, in what is better described as fake prophecy, that neither he nor anyone else would be sworn in:

...neither Alhaji Abubakar Atiku of PDP nor Bola Tinubu of APC nor Mr. Peter Obi of LP or any other 2023 presidential candidate shall be inaugurated as the elected President of Nigeria in 2023 (Tolu-Kolawole 4).

The popular Prophet Chukwuemeka Odumeje, also known as ‘Indabosky’, noted that the presidential candidate of the Labour Party, Peter Obi, will succeed Buhari and wipe tears away from the eyes of Nigerians. While speaking to journalists after a church service at his Mountain of Holy Ghost Intervention and Deliverance Ministry, Onitsha, Anambra State in March 2023 Odumeje predicted that “Peter Obi will succeed Buhari. That is what God revealed to me. Nigerians will be happy because of it. That is what the spirit has told me.”

There are many other prophecies on Youtube and other digital platforms that the men of God have been using to prophesy what was going to happen in this 2023 presidential election. All of them lay claim to receiving their oracles from God. However, it makes one wonder if this God is one and the same. Why would this God be double speaking like a swindler, snake oil merchant or a fraudster?

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was twofold. Firstly, it set out to examine the use of digital platforms or cyberspace for religious activities and secondly, to assess this usage in order to ascertain whether it is for the benefit of God and the faithful or for the personal or religious aggrandizement. The analyzed data showed that Nigeria is a deeply divided country on religious and ethnic lines. Having known this, both political and religious leaders, many times hand in glove, unite to use religion to divide the citizens for their personal gains.

On the use of prophecies, the paper submits that these pastors or prophets are embarrassing God by making him look weak and dishonest. If all they said as they alluded that it came from God, why would God choose to contradict himself in the most embarrassing manner? Most of the prophecies did not come to pass. But the truth is, all the prophecies were done for the revenue that will accrue from them.

The paper recommends in conclusion with a word of caution: the politicization of religion will do no good to Nigerians just as commercializing prophetic oracles. Religious leaders are called upon to refrain from this way of embarrassing God and stick to the gospel of salvation. They should seek first God's Kingdom and the rest shall be added to them. Nothing more. Nothing less. Nothing else.

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