

**RE-EVALUATION OF ECUMENISM AND INTER FAITH DIALOGUE ADMIST
PROLIFERATION OF CHRISTIAN DENOMINATION IN ANAMBRA STATE:
A SEARCH FOR SOLUTION**

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Abstract

This study examines the dynamics of ecumenism and interfaith dialogue within Anambra State, Nigeria, focusing on the challenges posed by the proliferation of Christian denominations. Anambra State, a vibrant epicenter of Christianity in Nigeria, experiences significant denominational fragmentation, leading to inter-denominational tensions and competition. This research aims to identify the historical, cultural, and theological factors contributing to these divisions and to propose practical solutions for fostering unity and cooperation among Christian groups. Through qualitative methodologies, including interviews with religious leaders and community stakeholders, the study provides an in-depth analysis of the successes and limitations of current ecumenical and interfaith initiatives. The findings reveal critical areas needing attention, such as doctrinal differences, socio-political influences, and resource disparities. The study suggests strategic frameworks to enhance ecumenical collaboration and promote effective interfaith dialogue, emphasizing the importance of inclusive policies, education, and grassroots involvement. By addressing these challenges, the research aspires to contribute to a more cohesive Christian community in Anambra State, fostering peace and cooperation in a region marked by religious diversity. This study offers valuable insights and actionable solutions for enhancing unity and understanding among the numerous Christian denominations in Anambra State.

Keywords: Re-Evaluation, Ecumenism, Dialogue, Proliferation, Christian Denomination

Introduction

The concept of ecumenism is no longer new in Christendom. It began formally about 1900, in Edinburgh, with the aim of ensuring co-operation and unity among the Christian denominations. Ibebuike (2006) states that the ecumenical dreams came on board because the church of Jesus Christ, which from time immemorial was founded on the basis of unity and love, has been subjected to persistent schism, proliferation and disintegration. According to Onwubiko (1999) it was this phenomenal breakage that apparently led to the

agitation for church unity, a situation whereby Christians from different denominational backgrounds will strive jointly for unity in the essentials of Christianity. Efforts in ecumenism are the possible ways of facilitating the fulfillment of our Lord's Prayer for unity as in John's gospel (17:21.). Moreover, Boyer (1965) is of the view that, as a follow-up to that, this project of repairing the broken walls of Christian unity led to the conference of 1910, which took place in Edinburgh. Although, the move marked the beginning of modern ecumenical movement, it was mainly a Protestant affair because the Roman Catholic Church stayed away from the movement. From then, till the present moment, considerable progress has been made towards accomplishment of the project of Christian unity.

Concept of Ecumenism and Inter Faith Dialogue

According to Wikipedia (2012), the word ecumenism is derived from its Greek etymology *oikoumene* meaning the inhabited world. This implies a world-wide phenomenon or general movement in extent, influence or application, presupposes a state of division among Christians. The word ecumenism contrasts with interfaith dialogue or interfaith pluralism aimed at unity or co-operation among diverse religions and referring to a world-wide religious unity by the advocacy for a greater sense of shared spirituality. Achunike (1995) states that "ecumenism is both a movement and an attitude of openness towards Christians of different traditions in order to learn from their various experiences and deepen one's own commitment to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ". (p. 84). Kaigama (2006) puts the concept in a narrower and more common-sense perspective. To him, ecumenism refers to the movement towards co-operation among Christians. Ecumenism simply refers to Christians of different Christian denominations working together. According to Web-stars dictionary (2012), ecumenism refers to the unity in a context which pertains to the entire inhabited earth and universal extent. The ecumenical movement began with protestant Christianity, expanded through organizations like the World Council of Churches, and now through grassroots associations, is understood as a complete interfaith dialogue (Wikipedia, 2012). Other available sources claimed that, the source of ecumenical initiatives came from the Roman Catholic Church. For the Roman Catholic Church, ecumenism signifies attempts to reconcile with the Christians who had become separated over theological issues. The Catholic Church sees itself as the one, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, founded by Christ himself. Its teachings state that the proper church of Christ is identical with the Catholic Church, thus excluding all other Christian religious groups and churches (Wikipedia, 2012). Webster's dictionary (2012) sees ecumenism as "the furthering of religious unity among different Christian faiths" (p.78). It is initially all about meeting other Christians and getting to know them so that they could arrive at a better understanding of their religious positions (Church, 2012).

History of Christian Denominationalism in Anambra State

History of Christianity in Anambra state cannot be discussed without brief introduction of history of Christianity in Nigeria. Christianity in Nigeria is dated back to as far as the 14th century, and because of the determination and religiosity the indigenes, the church grew very fast, despite the various challenges and changes in time the church went through. Adamolekun (2012) categorized the coming of Christianity in Nigeria into five stages, which are the time of entry of Latin Christianity, the time of denominationalism and missionary activities, the time of the yearning of independent churches, the time of Indigenous African churches, the time of Charismatic Evangelical and Pentecostal churches that gave birth to Pentecostalism. The church was born out of necessity for the spread of the gospel message. The Apostolic zeal is still present with the Church today, and for this reason, the church has not stopped this missionary work of evangelization. But it is also worrisome to find out that the church has multiplied into too many sects and denominations. Oko and Umanah (2022) have this say concerning the proliferation of churches:

When you look into the matter of proliferation of churches, you will find out that it confirms what the Bible says that in the last days many people would say “there is where the Lord is” and many people would come in the name of the Lord and would preach a lot of things and would follow them. Also, many people would have itching ears to hear what suit them. And the Bible says, it is in the last days that these things would happen. And of course, this is the last day that is why you hear churches of different names and different doctrines (pp. 262-263).

For him some people think proliferation of churches is revival but is not actually true. Ogunkunle (2006) has different view on this too. For him there is nothing wrong with proliferation of churches because the fact remains that if churches do not proliferate, something else will proliferate. According to Ukpong (2008) evil will proliferate if the church does not. He believes that some churches are occult while some are camouflaged shrines and sees proliferation of churches as a good development especially in Africa because evil would have been more if not for churches. He claims that social and moral decadence would have been worse than what we have now and supports the springing up of churches, because for him if they do not evil will multiply.

Major Christian Denominations in Anambra State

The major Christian denominations in Anambra state ranges from the Anglican church of Nigeria, Roman Catholic Church and the Pentecostal churches. Under this unit, we are going to discuss the Christian denominations one after another.

Anglican Church

Anglican Church of Nigeria is one of the oldest Christian denominations in this country. It got into the country in the 15th century. Eventually, the first mission of the Church of England was established in Badagry by Henry Townsend in 1842. The history of Christianity in Anambra state can be traced to the arrival of the Anglican mission precisely in the late 18th to the beginning of the 19th century. According to Kalu (1996), the church missionary society (C.M.S) came in through Onitsha under the supervision of Bishop Ajayi Crowder. Sequel to his acceptance to join evangelism in England in 1789, William Wilberforce vowed to devote his energy to the abolition of slave trade which had its greatest source in Africa and Nigeria in particular. It was a combination of their interest in India and Africa and the anti-slavery campaign that moved them to favour a rekindling of the fire of evangelization and the establishment in 1799 of a society for missions to Africa and the East. Okpalike and Nwadiolor (2015) reinstates that, the missionary society was later named church missionary society (C.M.S) as it was founded by a group of sixteen clergy men and nine laymen in 1799. This was a time when evangelicals were few in number and their influence in the church was limited.

Later on, the church elected Samuel Ajayi Crowther, a Yoruba man and former slave in 1864. This made him the first black bishop of the Anglican Communion. On his way, Samuel Ajayi Crowder arrived at Onitsha on July 26, 1856 and on July 27 they were formally welcome by the traditional ruler of Onitsha, Obi Anazonwu and his elders in council. The church was then planted and the mission successfully inaugurated in Onitsha. Thus, this marked the official operation of the church in Anambra state and Igboland at large. The Anglican Church thus became the mother of the Christian mission in Igboland in 1857. According to Jones (1952), the church being an evangelism church came along with the seed of Pentecostalism which is essentially and intrinsic aspect of the evangelical tradition which the Anglican Church represents.

Roman Catholic Church

The arrival of Roman Catholic mission in Anambra state dates back to arrival of the Holy Ghost fathers in Igbo-land in the late 19th century. The CMS movement had introduced Christianity to the eastern people who at first were resistant to the teachings and only allowed their slaves to interact with the Anglican clergy men. Paul (2013) states that, it was the aggressive pattern of evangelism that caused the neglect of the Christian faith at its inception. The Holy Ghost fathers under the supervision of the Irish and French clergy men who settled down in Onitsha and decided to spread their faith beyond the shores of Onitsha. Father Shanaham and Father Daniel Walsh were the front runners of the Catholic movement

in Igbo land (Nwadiakor, 2016). According to him, proper funding by both the French and Irish missions saw the rise of Catholic Church.

Pentecostal Churches

The Pentecostal mission came to Anambra state in the late 1980s and swept away the entire region with their pattern of worship. The likes of Baptist Church, Assemblies of God and Miracle World Ministry which is an off shot of assemblies but carried the mantle of evangelism in the state. Other Pentecostal churches include: Redeem Christian church of God, Mountain of Fire Ministries, Christ Embassy, The Lords Chosen, Four Square Gospel churches amongst others. Also, other Christian denominations that took charge in the early 1980s all worked towards the promotion of the Christian faith in the state. Some of the other denominations that were more recognized by the people were churches like Watchman charismatic revival ministries as well as other ministries that still announce themselves even till now.

Factors Responsible for the Proliferation of Churches

Religious Factor

This is one of the factors responsible for the proliferation of churches in Nigeria. It is an undisputable fact that Africans are deeply religious, spiritual and superstitious. It is on this note that Adamo (1985), observes that the richest and the most important heritage of Africa is religion. This heritage permeates the entire life of the African people. The heritage had dominated the thinking of African people to the extent that it shapes their cultural, social, political and economic activities. It has also shaped all aspects of African life to the extent that it becomes so difficult to separate what is religion from what can be considered secular. To the Africans, religion is a source of real life. Ogunkunle (2006) opines that the practice of religion is the fact that it gives people a feeling of security by a divine power that watches over them and protects them from every form of evils. Similarly, Udofia (2006), observes that African is twenty-four hours a day in grip of fear, he fears the world which he lives, he fear his fellow human being, he fear the threat of natural and supernatural forces, he fears the land in which he lives; the spirit amongst others. Therefore, the essential point of this belief is that being a devotee to the new found faith in Christ Jesus will bring succor to their wellbeing in the family circle.

Political Factor

There is no doubt that the development of political struggle against colonialism and various forms of white minority rule in Africa did contribute to a certain extent, to the rise of the numerous independent movements. For instance, in South Africa, according to Buhman (1985), in 1957” a clause in one of the apartheid bills gave the minister power to exclude

Africans from any church in a white area” (p. 17). Because of this segregation in worship, Cone (1994), was right when he asked: “Can the Church of Jesus Christ be politically, socially and economically identified with the structures of oppression and also be a servant of Christ? Can the church of Jesus Christ fail to make the liberation of the poor the center of its message and work, and still remain faithful to the Lord?” (p. 19). These rejected Africans were to accept the realities facing them by making out of them what seemed possible. The need to satisfy their religious and political aspirations gave rise to the emergence of a multiplicity of church movements.

According to Dauda and Gbule (2000), African churches emerged due to competition over positions of authority in the church. The mission churches failed to co-opt the African Christians into church government. Missions were divided into European management and African labor. It became the rule that no European missionary should be placed under African authority. An English missionary supported this missionary policy when in 1927 he said to the people, “God wants you all to be Christians, some few of you to be priest; but chooses only white men as bishops” (p. 98). These external and internal influences have caused the people of God here in Africa to be more divided and fragmented. More so, Iroegbu (1995) opines that there is an external and internal influence on the division and continued proliferation of churches in African countries. Europe and America sponsor these splits consciously in order to keep us more divided and fragmented and consequently be inept to present a united front, unable to speak with one voice and deprived of a common religious, social and political solidarity. He maintained that, internally there is the equal manipulation of the numerous groups in political and ideological machinery. The religious leaders vying for political recognition by state authority utilize their hold on their adherents as voting and negotiating bullets to shoot at and obtain their wants and needs. On the whole, political factor has helped in the multiplicity of churches we are witnessing in the recent time.

Economic Factor

One of the areas where people often criticize expansion of churches is their attitude to materialism. People see opening of churches as a means of making not just profit but also an avenue of getting rich quickly. Udofia (2006) asserts that this situation is achieved by the wide range of deceits and falsehood perpetuated by the self-acclaimed pastors, prophets, presidents and founders of these new churches. These deceptions are carefully and beautifully sold to unsuspecting religious fanatics through popular religious slogans such as “bless you” “A big Amen, a long drawn out praise the Lord, Amen and God bless you”. Still on the economic factor, Iroegbu (1994) observes that the Nigerian poor socio-economic condition is a direct co-determinant of the rush to these churches, healing centers and prayer houses in search of wellbeing. Patronizers of these churches go not for divine

worship or praise, but to seek and obtain material social welfare, health, jobs, money, security and assurances. Disu (1998), expressed this view when he said that what had given credence to the upsurge of proliferation of churches is nothing more than the socio-economic insecurities which have crept into the lives of Nigerians. He maintains that various kinds of frustration and tensions are decisive factors, which have driven people to all these sects to seek compensation for what they have lost in their socio-economic lives. Our country, Nigeria is witnessing a high rate of unemployment inflation, poor living conditions and frustrations of different kinds. Criminality such as armed robbery, kidnapping, banditry and terrorism are of increase. Then the result of these happenings are broken business, broken relationships, broken homes, and all in need of restoration.

Against this background and a positive response, various sects and prophets announced God's visitation. According to Umoh (2013) prosperity gospel has put God back at the center of human experiences by positing God as more than capable of meeting all the needs of desperate Nigerians. It is based on this fact that Oko (2018) asserts that prosperity church leader often claim a specific blessing can be exchange for the money being donated to their ministry; some instruct worshippers to hold their donations above their heads during prayers. This is because when they raised their donations above their heads, heaven will quickly recognize the giver and there will be financially breakthrough. Therefore, judging from the premise, religion appear to be the most lucrative business today, giving birth to innumerable sects and one can quickly be tempted to agree that if you want to be rich found a church. On contrary, material benefits as a reward for well-fulfilled Christian life is far away from the teaching of Jesus Christ. However, these causes of church expansion will be checked when morality is being observed by individual Christian as well as the church, the body of believers that embrace the faith planted by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Social Factor

One of the reasons for the rise of the African Independent Churches in Nigeria was the crave for leadership and popularity. Nwokereke (2006) opines that man is essentially a social being, who is by nature complete, independent and distinct from one another, but with his limited abilities cannot fully develop and actualize his potentials without the fellowship or interaction of his fellow man either in the church or any social gathering. Man needs a strong desire for participation in the life, structure and system including the power structure. People want recognition, valuation and status, and the cheapest way for man to be recognized is to establish a church in order to have disciples, and more so to boast their own ego. Commenting on the ecclesial recognition and consciousness among church founders, Ukpogon (2008) observes that there is personal identification with the church "My church" slogan is become popular among Nigerians. Expression such as ... "There is a function in my church," "Come and worship with me in my church", "my church does not

discriminate”, “there is fasting in my church today.” “Our church is growing because Jesus is the Lord in our church”, “My church is having her annual harvest and I must be there,” (p. 130).

The ecclesial identification is now influencing very many people to establish church for cheap recognition, but not spirituality. The social aspect of worship made so many people to embrace the newly found faith because according to them, the old churches have stereotyped, dry, at times intellectual liturgy while the new churches attracts converts via a more practical down to earth and participated form of worship. These include the active use of one’s body in singing, dancing music that touches the inner longings of a repenting soul.

Psychological Factor

One of the psychological factors in the society is fear. Fear is a phenomenon that pushes people into different churches for solution. People go to prayer houses in search of security and freedom from evil forces that threaten life. Ndiokwere (1994) confirms that, as long as one is not in the position to control certain spiritual forces one describes as diabolical, one is bound to feel insecure. Secondly in some cases one experiences hostile force tormenting him and his entire household, one will be left with no option than to cross rivers and mountains in search of answer to his problems. Since miracle has now become the most cherished product which can easily attract people to run around the so-called wonder workers in the Christian folk, many of these miracle preachers parade themselves as having the same power of Jesus that in their worship centers their members almost worship them along with God. For instance, man being naturally religious believe that God can and really does reveal things to man. Research and science do not always provide all the answers, but according to them prophecy plays a major role. Essien (2021) reveals that if someone can keep himself holy and keep all the precepts of God, God can definitely reveal secret things to him. This explains why people approach a man of God in order to interpret God’s revelation through prophecy and visions. However, the challenges to mental health is an important psychological factor that make people rush to the prayer houses coupled with the fact that many Nigerians are poor and healthcare expenses are high, making healthcare inaccessible for mentally challenged people.

Positive Impacts of Proliferation of Churches

Financial Support and True Brotherhood

Many churches are doing well in alleviating the poor conditions of their members by showing greater concern and providing them some economic survival. According to Oko and Umanah (2022), members of most of the new religious movements never feel lost in the crowd; there is always greatest concern for one another. Once an individual is not seen for some time in the gathering, they take it as a point of duty to look for the person, find out

what is wrong and provide for his or her needs. It is on this note that Oko and Umanah (2022) observes that financial support and true brotherly love is very minimal in some mainline churches because some members who are sick and lack what to eat, the church which he or she is a member does not care about the individual, but instead they imposes some levies on their members. Sometimes if a member dies, they have to impose some levy before they can bury their corpses. According to Ukpog (2008), the new churches creates an atmosphere in which individuals help each other, finding them jobs and visiting them when they are sick. This is a fundamental reawakening of the communal life of the early Christians which is in harmony with the African sense of communalism and togetherness.

Proper Self-examination

Proliferation of churches has made the authorities of the mainline churches to sit up properly and re-examine their mode of operation. Thus, the authorities are challenged to welcome new ideas, information and avoid stereotypes activities. According to Nmah (2008), one of the positive effects of the proliferation of religion in the society is that, it has made the mother churches to wake up from their spiritual slumber. Every church is struggling to avoid having some challenges and difficulties that faced them in the past which may have resulted in the secession of sizeable members of the congregation. Ukpog (2008) affirms this on the proper study of the Holy Bible, "Pentecostalism has reawakened a general desire and love for the Bible as the written word of God and a perennial document of authentic Christian life. Many Christians nowadays take the Bible seriously and it is no longer considered as a book meant for the clergy alone" (p. 170). Therefore, the awakened interest in the Bible is helping people to realize the importance of studying the word of God as commanded in II Tim.2:15. The Bible remains an authoritative word of God.

Expansion of the Christian Gospel

This is another positive that the proliferation of churches in Nigeria brought. According to Okafor (2008), church proliferation has led to the rapid competition of different doctrine and expansion of Christianity to every nook and cranny in Nigeria. That is, it has lessened the tedious task of evangelizing in Nigeria by only the frontlines churches. Sometimes crusades and church retreats are conducted in the villages which predisposes the villages to having direct access to the gospel. Based on this backdrop, Salami (2001), comments that, the missionaries succeeded in converting millions of West Africans to Christianity. These people were either traditional worshippers or Muslims before their conversion. As a result of the conversion, the Africans were made to forsake some of their obnoxious customs such as human sacrifices as well as the killing of twins. Mary Slessor was to be specially remembered in this regard. This is particularly important considering that, one of the factors that inhibited the spread of the gospel in Nigeria during the missionary era was lack of indigenous personnel, and since the initiative of the new religious movements often come

from Nigerians themselves, it has helped in taking the gospel to even the remotest part of the country.

Therefore, proliferation of churches has contributed tremendously to the spread of the gospel of Christ. Oko and Umanah (2022) reveal that, this is in consonance with the Holy Scriptures as stated in Acts 1:8. “But you shall receive powers when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth”.

Introduction of Western Education and Employment Opportunities

Historically, colonial government did not take the initiative to provide education for the non-literate Africans. According to Obiora (1999), it was recognized that if people learned to read, write and compute, they would be less willing to remain under foreign colonial control. Plantation owners were generally not interested in education because they feared that educated workers would not remain on the plantation with low cash wages. Moreso, business firms generally were not interested in education of Africans, thinking primarily of how increased taxes and demands for better working conditions would affect immediate business profit. Also, the fact that the colonial government was not financially buoyant to sponsor missionaries as well as establishing schools, it remained for the Christian churches to bring education to the Africans. According to Dauda and Gbule (2000), the various Christian missions established schools where mission stations were opened. The CMS established Grammar School in 1908 and the Dennis Memorial Grammar School in 1878. The Roman Catholic Mission founded St. Gregory College Lagos in 1868, while the Baptist Academy was founded in Lagos in 1883. Therefore, the activities of the missionaries led to the provision and growth for both Christianity and secular education. The present hundreds of seminaries, theological colleges and universities have been established to train Nigerians to become literates as well as generate employment opportunities to the jobless Nigerians.

Some of the schools established by churches includes: Bowen University (owned and operated by the Nigerian Baptist); Covenant University (owned by Living Faith Church); Landmark University (established by Living Faith Church); Benson Idahosa University (owned by Church of God Mission); Redeemers University, (owned by the Redeemed Christian Church of God); Rhema University (owned by Living Christ Mission); Joseph Ayo Babalola University (owned by Christ Apostolic Church); Mountain Top University (founded by Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries); Anchor University (owned by the Deeper Life Christian Ministry), Wesley University of Nigeria (WUNO) owned by Methodist Church, Nigeria, University on the Niger (owned by Anglican Diocese on the Niger) and Obong University (established by the Church of Christ) amongst others.

With regard to healthcare services, some of these churches have also established hospitals and other care delivery services to all segments of the society. Through these medium, the churches are contributing not only to the spiritual life of the citizens, but also to human capital development and the development of the society in general. Hence, the Christian missions both past and present regards education as an instrument of conversion and nurture. The aim of building these institutions were to raise a generation of leaders who would bail Nigerians out of illiteracy, ignorance, subjective thinking and prejudice and also to restore the dignity of the entire black race.

Negative Impacts of the Proliferation of Churches

Religious Confusion

One major effect of the proliferation of churches is the religious confusion it has caused among the people. These new religious movements come with different doctrines and moral disparity that one does not know which one to follow. Everyone claim to be the true church. The Bible has been subjected to individual interpretation of which when quoted out of context to suit the whims and caprices of the individual churches. Most unfortunate, the founders of churches do not have good theological training, as such mislead their followers.

Nwabor (1985) observes that, there are a number of churches today which honour their founders as incarnation of God. For instance, Nigerians witnessed in the 80s the deeds and tragic end of Jesus of Oyingbo. According to Oko and Umanah (2022) when Jesus of Oyingbo died in 1984 his church was scattered and the kingdom became desolated. It can generally be assumed that many confusions of our times in Christianity stem from the fact that people have different teachings and doctrines. The individual interpretation of the Bible has led to many erroneous teachings that the non-Christians do not know which one to join.

Noise Pollution

One of the related problems associated with church proliferation is noise pollution. According to Field (1993), noise pollution has been described as “an unwanted excessive harmonious sound that has undesired physiological and institutional effects on individuals” (p. 13). People living side by side with the church constantly experience noise pollution emanating from blaring loud speakers which might suffer from hearing impairment. Experts in medical science contend that, chronic exposure to noise may cause noise induced hearing loss. It could also lead to stress induced ailments like hypertension, diabetes and psychiatric problems. Oko and Umanah (2022) observes that apart from hearing impairment, the other effect is on the health are: anxiety, stress reaction and in some extreme situation fright. Noise according to him; disturb sleep and when sleep is disturbed, it affects mental functioning and judgment.

Most often members of these new religious groups tend to practice their religion without considering its impacts on the immediate environment. They often embark on noisy religious activities with the loudest public address systems even when the church is in one room apartment. More worrisome is their night vigils which some of them hold almost every day as if God hear prayers only at nights. In some areas in the society where there are many of such churches, the experience of the people within the neighbourhood can only be imagined and any attempt to persuade the pastors to consider the feelings of the people is often interpreted as devil's intervention that must be matched with fierce noisy prayers to combat the enemy. Hence, if the church is located among residential buildings, such events might disturb the peace of the whole neighborhood, and students living in such environment will lose concentration while reading at night.

Flamboyant Lifestyle

The flamboyant lifestyle among pastors and general overseers in new churches is very alarming. Their individualistic lifestyle depicts a leadership style devoid of commitment and care of the destitute. Ukpong (2008), observes that the flamboyant lifestyle of the Pentecostal Churches tends to suggest that they promote the worships of wealth rather than serving God. These pastors tend to live a lavish lifestyle while most of their congregants are poor. Wearing special clothing and displaying special behavior becomes their lifestyle. Achunike (2002) gives an insight into the flamboyant lifestyle of most Pentecostal pastors. He reported that their lifestyle has grossly affected many pastors. He goes on to reveal that some priest healers believe that flamboyant lifestyle plays a position role in converting and retaining the elite class. He argues that some pastors in mainline churches are imitating the flamboyant Pentecostal ministries who are using flashy cars and have well-decorated houses and functions in well decorated offices so that the rich people could respect and believe what they are demanding. He maintained that there is no justifiable reason for anyone to plunge himself into business of clerical flamboyant. More so, a good number of pastors from these new Churches have multiple cars at the expense of their poor members who do not even own a bicycle. They do not believe in the principle of simple or moderate lifestyle. Rather, they rejoice in living flamboyant lifestyle without feeling the pains their members are passing through to meet all their financial demands.

It is in this light of flamboyant lifestyle of pastors that many observe in IbionoIbom that proliferation of Churches is a commercial venture. According to Offiong (2003), the fact that the flamboyant lifestyle of Pentecostal ministers lead to much emphasizes on prosperity and neglected the repentance and salvation messages. Oko (2018) affirms this when he said that prosperity preaching is a poor imitation of the gospel because it leaves no room for brokenness, suffering, humility or delay and it does create illegal shortcut. Prosperity preachers promise instant result and overnight blessing or success if you don't get your

breakthrough it is because you don't give enough money in the offering. He maintained that Jesus calls us to deny ourselves and follow Him while prosperity preaching calls us to deny Jesus and follow our materialistic lusts. It should, therefore not be practiced or encouraged by ministers of both Pentecostals and non-Pentecostal churches, since the practice tends to anchor on materialism as the object of worship and not God.

Moral Laxity

Proliferation of Churches has caused some moral decadence in our society and churches. The behavior of our pastors and general overseers are worrisome. Some of them commit adultery with their members without feeling of guilt. This is because no one can excommunicate them based on the fact that they are the owner of the Church. In the days where churches were few, Church ministers maintained discipline with any member who misbehaved was disciplined. But today the reverse is the case whereby new churches are beckoning on them to give them responsibility and position. It is based on this Onwuegbu (2004) observes that morality losing its grip on churches today as compared to the time of old. Some of them who claim to have gift of healing go extra miles to invoke the power of demons to heal. Ukpong (2008) observes that the practice of healing, deliverance, vision, dream, and prophecy are subtly entering into the "Official Christianity" in the country. According to him, the emphasis given to this phenomenon in contemporary African Christianity can easily lead to a conclusion that there is an emergence of neo-paganism in the country.

According to Umoh (2013), a certain self-acclaimed Bishop Sunday William had executed hundreds of suspected child witches in AkwaIbom State at the request of parents. He confessed that parents paid him to kill their kids to avert from their families' witchcraft related misfortunes. Similarly, according to him a pastor was in court for raping a member of his congregation and a father pastor having a carnal knowledge with his biological daughters.

In a related development, Umoh (2013) reported inordinate incidents associated with pastors provoked a crack-down on many Pentecostal churches in Cameroon. According to him, Cameroon's President Paul Biya has ordered the closure of nearly 100 Christian churches in key cities, citing criminal practices organized by Pentecostal pastors that threaten the security of the West African nation. Biya is using the military to permanently shut down all Pentecostal church denominations in the nation's capital, Yaounde, and the North West Regional capital, Bamenda, which have the largest Christian populations in Cameroon. More than 50 churches have been closed, with the government targeting nearly 100 in eight other regions. More so, many members of these new generation churches have lost a sense of decency, decorum and virtue and immodest dressing and immorality are on

the increase. Unfortunately, some of these churches have condoned indecent dressing and moral laxity. Many ladies got to church half nude. Men are not exempted from these indecent wears. Some wear tight and saggy trousers. Explanation to this is that the Lord looks at the heart and not at the outward appearance. This explains the reason behind the influx of many youths into such churches. Christians are expected to be holy (1 Pet. 1: 15, 16) and the life of Christians should be Christ-like. From the above incidences and many more that cannot be adequately exhausted, the indiscipline attitude of pastors really calls for sober reflection. Jesus Christ our master was a living example which our pastors should be emulated, but the reverse is the case.

Adulteration of Gospel Message

Adulteration of gospel message is now obvious in Nigerian Christianity. Many self-acclaimed men of God no longer preach salvation messages rather focus now on preaching sermons to entice many people, as a way of attracting them into their church. Nwaozuru (2020) states that some crusade/ revival themes used by some churches are aimed to woo people to their Church, crusade themes like Bet9ja must favor me this year, who is holding my wedding gown, operation take your child and so on are nothing but to attract youths to their churches. Adulteration of Gospel message has given room for materialism to be given high priority among many Christians in Nigeria. Materialism in form of prosperity gospel is a very common message preached regularly in some Churches in Nigeria. The excessive prosperity preaching seems to promote adulteration of the gospel message. Nwaozuru (2020) opines that it is not to say that for Christians to prosper is a sin (3 John 2) but the way some preachers present prosperity message makes it look similar to materialism. Iheanacho (2009) states that the contemporary Nigerian church is engulfed by the quest for materialism, prevalent in the society. Rather than find solace in the Christian hope of eternal life, signs of total submission to capitalistic tendencies, especially in insatiable material acquisition, looms large in some churches. It could be observed that the spiritual growth and moral sanctity towards better eternity is fast giving way to material craving. The level of material quest by Nigerian Christians is evidence that there is high rate of adulteration of the gospel message. This has made many Christians to lose focus on the real essence of Christianity which is salvation of human soul to acquisition and flamboyant display of wealth in the society. Adulteration of the gospel message has promoted denominationalism, unhealthy rivalry and antagonism amongst Christians not only in Anambra State but to the entire Nigerian society.

Ecumenical Impacts of Christian Association of Nigeria to the Growth of Christianity in Anambra State

Christian Association of Nigeria has made some positive impact. It has been able to impact Anambra State and the entire Nigerian society in varied ways.

Inter Faith Dialogue

For the various Christian denominations in Anambra State to work in unity, there must be a platform for inter faith dialogue. Inter faith dialogue is a challenging process by which Christians from different denominations or adherents of differing religious traditions encounter each other in order to break down the walls of division that stand at the centre of most wars. The objective of inter faith dialogue is peaceful and harmonious coexistence among people in the same or different faiths. Interfaith dialogue is about people of different faiths coming to a mutual understanding and respect that allows them to live and cooperate with each other in spite of their differences. Interfaith dialogue is not just words or talk. It includes human interaction and relationships. When inter faith dialogue is properly carried out, Catholics, Anglicans, Pentecostals can cohabit in peace and win more souls for Christ under the banner of unity in diversity.

Inter Denominational Marriage

Marriage is very crucial and necessary to the survival and continuity of every society. The institution of marriage is held sacrosanct and care is taken to ensure that it is well preserved, without going into extinction. The marriage institution is a common phenomenon in every part of the world. This means that marriage is not abhorred in any human society. It is a practice that is universal; the only difference is that the approach to it varies from one culture to another. Marriage has significant value for the individual, families and the society at large. Marriage in Christian context is one man one wife, meaning that Christian marriage is monogamous in practice (1Timothy 3:2). Christian marriage was instituted by God after created Adam and Eve. Gay marriage is scripturally forbidden and in Nigeria, the offence for same sex marriage is fourteen years imprisonment. It has been observed that in the early days of Christianity in Anambra State, people from different denominations rarely married. According to Anaukwu (2012) at a stage, Christians of one denomination would neither marry nor attend wedding by members of the other denomination. It was clear that if you marry or give a hand in marriage from another denomination that was not yours, the person would receive penance or punishment. Anaukwu (2012) further reports that Revd Fr. Cyprain Michael Tansi flogged Mrs. AzukaEbo for accepting an Anglican marriage. This invariably affected the Christian family. In some parts of Igbo-land, people are told not to associate with Christians of other denominations nor accept marriage

proposals from them. Anaukwu (2012) writes thus; they must not marry us so that they may not lose their souls.

However, in this 21st century especially with the formation of Christian Association of Nigeria, Inter-denominational marriage is encouraged among Christians. According to Okeke C (personal communication on December 10 2023), I am from a Catholic family however I married from a Pentecostal family also my sister married an Anglican priest. It could be said that encouraging Inter-denominational marriage could help to bridge the widening gap between various Christian denominations in Anambra State.

Respect and Tolerance for One's Religion

Respect and tolerance for each other's religious beliefs is important in a multi-faith society like Nigeria. Tolerance is defined by Bello (2023) as sympathy or acceptance of feelings, habits or beliefs that are different from one-self. It is also the willingness to bear or accept with other's opinions or behaviors. The need to bear or accept with the opinions or behaviors of others in a multi-religious state like Nigeria cannot be undermined. Nigeria is made up of various religions with Muslims and Christians as major groups. Even within the Christian religion, there are denominations among them with minor or major differences in liturgies, belief system and doctrines. In view of this denominationalism in Nigerian Christianity, there is no doubt that if Nigerians must continue to live together in peace and harmony, it is essential for them to tolerate one another. As tolerance is an important virtue needed for the development and progress of any society. Even the Holy Bible teaches tolerance. The strong in faith are admonished to bear with the weak in faith with the view to uplifting each other spiritually. The Bible teaches adherence to respect everyone's God given human dignity regardless of gender, race or social status. Christians in Nigeria should do away with unhealthy rivalry, antagonism discrimination, among fellow believers in the Christian faith and be willing to contribute to spreading the values of understanding, patience, respect and peaceful coexistence which are associated with tolerance. After all, tolerance is not simply an attitude but an essential element needed for the peace, unity and continues growth and development of Christianity in Anambra and Nigeria at large.

Practice of Brotherhood

The practice of brotherhood is found both in Igbo culture and in the Scripture. The Igbo believe that Igwebuiké (unity is strength), this can only be achieved when we are bonded together like the bunch of broom. Individualism is not part of Igbo culture rather community consciousness. Community consciousness results in every member of the society contributing to foster unity and succour to all and sundry. Brotherhood is upheld in the scripture. This is seen in Galatians 6:2 "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." So Christians no matter the denomination face challenges however these challenges ranging from unhealthy rivalry, antagonism discrimination, among fellow

believers could be ameliorated by upholding and practicing community consciousness and brotherhood at all times

Government Neutrality

As it has been stated above that religion and politics are interwoven in Nigeria. Hence, there is the need for the government to be neutral and avoiding siding any religious group or Christian denomination. Bello (2023) enunciates that government should rise to their obligations and take practical measures to address and eliminate incidence of intolerance. In other way round, the government should tolerate all the Christian denominations in Anambra State without being partial. For instance, when Peter Obi was returning mission schools to the churches, he was neutral as all the mission schools were returned to their original owners. As he denoted school buses to schools many schools irrespective of the denomination that established the school received the vehicular donation. For denominationalism to reduce to the barest minimum, the government of the day should be neutral in her dealings especially ecclesiastical affairs.

Prospects of Ecumenism in Anambra State

The prospect of ecumenism in Anambra State is on the positive. Christ promised that he will build his church and no gate of hades will prevail against the church. He further prayed for the unity of believers as expressed in John 17:11; 20 and 21. Furthermore, Eregare et al (2017) elucidate that the Nigerian experience of ecumenism has attained some levels of uniformity in the areas of education, providing joint health services, and media Service center, joint statements/mobilization, thrust for politics under the umbrella of Christian Association of Nigeria orchestrated through ecumenism. Today in Anambra and Nigeria there are establishments of Bible Society of Nigeria, and National Ecumenical Centre, with numerous achievements under the umbrella of Christian Association of Nigeria. Hence, ecumenism will continue to take place owing to its pivotal role in sustenance of peace and harmonious relationship among Christian denominations in Anambra and Nigeria at large.

Conclusion

Ecumenism is very crucial and important to the sustenance of cordial relationship among Christian denominations in Anambra State and Nigeria at large. According to Eregare et al (2017), for oneness claim that if there must be ecumenical initiatives, it must be based on the coming together of all Christian denominations that were since the notable era of schism in Christianity and in the 11th century experience to a single Christian church. This foundation must be upon the solid Rock, Jesus Christ, and not on any acclaimed or self-imposed denomination or vicar Church of Christ. It must be on a church that based her

teachings on law and the testimonies of Christ (Rev. 14:12). The concept should be based on a back-to-the-Bible based foundation or Theology. Simply put, ecumenism should not be the coming together or promotion of different denominations with differed theological differences for better understanding or accommodation of sister churches to promote peace and harmonious coexistence of various Christian denominations in Anambra and Nigeria at large.

Recommendations

Having attempted an x-ray of ecumenism in Nigeria and having probed into efforts made so far, and their problems, the researcher now makes the follow recommendations: -

1. Firstly, there must be the avoidance of negative traits that often lead to antagonism. Christianity must avoid arrogance, fanaticism and discrimination, amongst others and emphasize the idea of God, one people, one culture and religion.
2. In the second place, the interior change of life and conversion is needed in the lives of the Christians if ecumenism will work. Minds must first be renewed while attitudes are to be developed before the desire for unity can materialize. There must be self-denial, humility, gentility in the life of the Christians, who promote Christian unity. In fact, the deeper they are with the word, the Father and the Holy Spirit, the more they grow in brotherly love.
3. In addition to this, ecumenism should be accepted not as Catholic or Protestant affair but as a collective affair. Ecumenism is without doubt a common Christian project which no single church can achieve alone. The true value of a church's ecumenical effort is therefore ascertained by viewing them from the other churches lenses. So, for local catholic directives and initiatives to convince the other churches and Christian communities in Africa of the genuineness of the interest and advances of the Catholic Church towards them, their contents and expressions must show sufficient respect for the sensitivities of other communities. Once this becomes her priority, full-blown ecumenism will be actualized.
4. Furthermore, the Church should prepare her faithful on how to properly engage in the ecumenical dialogue by teaching them the needed skills to enter into such dialogue. One who engages in dialogue with other creeds is like an "ambassador" of his faith. In view of this, the individual must be well grounded on the tenets and practices of his faith. That is to say that the Catholic faith, the priests and catechist are to be well-informed in order to carry out this work well.

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