

**MISCONSTRUING PROPHETS AND PROPHECY:
IMPLICATIONS FOR CATHOLIC FAITH IN NIGERIA.**

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Abstract

Prophets and prophecy in contemporary Nigerian Christianity have generated complex theological and pastoral challenges for the Catholic Church. This article examines the phenomenon of misconstruing prophets and prophecy - understood as the misinterpretation, misuse, and commercialization of prophetic activities - within Nigeria's religious landscape and its implications for Catholic faith and practice. Drawing on biblical theology, Catholic teaching on prophecy, and empirical observations of Nigerian religious culture, the study distinguishes authentic prophetic ministry from practices that reduce prophecy to divination, material prosperity, or political prediction. It analyses how Simony, abuses of Eucharistic Adoration, commercialization of miracles, preference of Eucharistic Adoration over the Holy Mass, emergence and spread of the prosperity gospel to juicy monetary benefits for priests contribute to the menace. The article argues that such misconstruals undermine core Catholic doctrines on revelation, the role of the Magisterium, and the communal nature of discernment, leading

to syncretism, spiritual dependency, and erosion of trust in ecclesial authority. It further explores the pastoral consequences, including the rise of alternative religious authorities, fragmentation of Catholic identity, and challenges to catechesis and sacramental life. The write-up proposes a framework for theological and pastoral renewal ranging from proper catechesis, checkmating of the priests' pastoral activities by the Bishops, going back to the Catholic root, deepening the Catholic Spirituality, practicing and passing-on the faith, Sacramental life and pious devotions to Social Entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Prophet, prophecy, misconstruing, catholic faith, predictions

Introduction

The choice of this topic is based on the observations made in the present-day Catholic Church where adoration sessions and the activities associated with it are becoming the norm, and it appears that some of these adoration practices within the Catholic faith have gradually absorbed elements reminiscent of Protestant-style worship. It is observed that priests now perform dramatic and extravagant actions - such as dancing on the altar, jumping across the sanctuary, and making performative prophetic utterances - blurring the lines between liturgical reverence and entertainment.

The laity, in turn, have become an audience to a theatrical display that is often detached from the theological and liturgical core of Catholicism. Stories of miraculous interventions and problem-solving prayers have increasingly dominated homilies, and prayer points often focus on material concerns such as connections for jobs, success in business, or protection from enemies. The sale of anointed oils, brooms, and handkerchiefs, marketed as spiritual tools for warding off evil and solving life's challenges, further complicates the integrity of worship. This observable shift has led to a distorted understanding of the priest's

role among the laity. For many, the ideal priest is no longer the one who faithfully follows Catholic liturgical norms but the one who can provide material and emotional solutions through frenzy-like “charismatic” and “prophetic” actions.

Of a truth, prophecy in Catholicism is primarily concerned with proclaiming God's word, sanctifying with the sacraments, and guiding the community in spiritual truth, as opposed to predicting the future or solving personal problems through miraculous means. Yet, in the Catholic Church, prophecy has taken on a more utilitarian role. As such, gullible people expect the priests to provide all direct solutions to daily challenges, akin to the practices seen in Pentecostal and charismatic movements. This trend not only threatens to erode the doctrinal foundation of the Church but also shifts the focus of worship from God-centered adoration to human-centered need fulfillment.

The implications of these developments are far-reaching. On the one hand, they may foster a superficial spirituality that prioritizes emotional and material gratification over a deeper, transformative relationship with God. On the other hand, they challenge the integrity of the priesthood itself, as priests may feel pressured to conform to these expectations in order to maintain relevance and wade authority among their congregations. Furthermore, there is the problem of priests emulating the practices of Protestant pastors, particularly in adopting charismatic, prophetic, and performative behaviors during Eucharistic adoration. This raises important questions: To what extent do these Protestant-style practices compromise the doctrinal and liturgical integrity of the Church? How do these deviations impact the theological understanding of the priesthood?

The competitive religious environment in Nigeria, marked by numerous Protestant churches using charismatic approaches to attract congregants, places additional pressure on Catholic priests

to retain their members. Can this competition justify the growing trend of priests engaging in self-promotion and altering worship to meet the expectations of the laity? Finally, how can the Church address the misconception that the priest must meet material or emotional demands to prevent a decline in membership? These underline the necessity of this article.

Therefore, this study aims to explore how the concept of prophecy is perceived by both priests and laity, and the extent to which this perception deviates from traditional Catholic teachings on priestly ministry and prophetic roles. It moves further to express the implication of this in the Church and possible remedy.

Who is a Prophet?

The Old Testament¹ is traditionally divided into three parts, depicted with the acronym *TaNak*: T – *Torah* (the Laws), N – *Neb'im* (the Prophets) and K – *Kethub'im* (the Writings or Hagiographa). The prophets form the second part of the OT; placed after the Pentateuch (*Pnts*). The word “Prophet” is an English translation of the Greek compound noun *prophetes* – “one who speaks before others.”² It comes from the Greek preposition *pro* – “in place of” or “in favour of”, “for” or “before” or “instead of” or “in advance of” and the verb *phemi* (literary or poetic synonym to *eipen* or *legei*) “to speak”, “to say.” So, *prophemi* stands for “to say before, openly”³ connoting that a prophet is one who speaks before an event comes to materialization. The most common word for prophet in the OT is

¹ OT will serve as abbreviation for Old Testament henceforth.

² John L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation 2002, 3rd reprint, 694.

³ George A. Buttrick et al., eds., *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, Nashville: Abingdon Press 1982, 13th printing, III, 920.

the Hebrew word *nabi*⁴; the meaning of which is doubtful and could probably be “one called”. Some compare it with the Akkadian *nabitu*, *nabu*⁵ “to call”, “to announce” “to speak aloud”, “diviner” or the Arabian “to bubble forth, as from a fountain”, “to utter” (cf. Ps. 45:1). In 1Chr 29:29, Nathan was called *nabi* – the prophet.

In the biblical sense, a prophet is “a person who serves as a channel of communication between the human and the divine world”⁶. He is the mouthpiece of God. He is “sent on a mission and inspired by God to reveal some secret thing, to deliver an oracle, to speak and make others grasp the divine thought and will, and finally, sometimes to foretell the future”⁷. However, to prophesy does not necessarily mean “to predict the future” but “to act and speak in the name of God, on His authority, as His delegate and spokesman”⁸. That is why the prophets usually begin their utterances with the prophetic formula *koh amar YHWH* “Thus says YHWH” (Am 1:3,6,9,11; 13;2:1,4,6) or “The word of YHWH came to me saying:” (Jer 7:1;11:1;18:1: 21:1; 30:1; 32:1; 34:1,8; 35:1; 40:1; 44:1) and ends or is sealed with the oracular formula – *nehum YHWH* “Oracle of YHWH” (Jer 1:8,15,19; 2:3,9,12,19,29) or “YHWH has spoken” or “the mouth of YHWH has spoken”⁹. This is like the signature of the prophets

⁴ This term appeared about three hundred times in the Hebrew Bible. Some interpret it as “one called” (Carroll Stuhlmueller, ed., *The Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Collegeville, MI: The Liturgical Press 1996, 784.

⁵ David N. Freedman et al., eds., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, New York: Doubleday 1992, V, 482.

⁶ Paul J. Achtemeier, et al, eds., *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, Bangalore: Theological Publications 2002, 826.

⁷ Xavier Leon-Dufour, *Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. By Terrence Prendergast, San Francisco: Harper & Row publ. 1980, 338.

⁸ E. Tobac, J., *Les Prophetes d'Israel*, I, Malines, 1932, 3-9.

⁹ Cf. Nancy R. Bowen, *Ezekiel, 3: Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries*, Nashville, Abingdon Press 2010, xii; Louismary Ocha, *Deconstruction and*

and serves a rhetorical function of indicating the author of the message as YHWH and the authenticity of the message with the messenger.

A prophet is also referred to as a *ro'eh/hozeh* – “seer” or “visioner” (cf. 1Sam 9:9,11,18,19; Isa 30:10; 2 Sam 24:11; 1Ch 29:29). It occurs seven times in reference to Samuel. In Jos 13:22, Balaam is called a *kosem* “diviner,” a word used only of a false prophet. Some places described a prophet as *'ish [ha] 'elohim* – “man of God” (1Kgs 17:18, 24; 2 Kgs 1:9-13)¹⁰; denoting the prophets as pious, devoted and godly persons (Dt 33:1; 1 Sam 9:6; 2 Kgs 8:11). Sometimes, he even plays the role of God (Ex 7:1-2).

From the above elucidations, the essential idea is that the prophet is an authorized spokesman. He has both a communicative and mediative role. He stands like a middleman between God and the people (Ex 6:28-7:2; Num 12:1-8; Dt 18:9-22)¹¹. Therefore, “the prophet is one called by God to be a messenger to God’s people. He is a visionary, who sees the life of the people from God’s perspective and who understands the consequences of their actions. The prophet is ‘God’s person’, who speaks to the people for God (the mouthpiece of God – Jer 1:9; Is 51:16), and hence what the prophet says is not of man but of God (2 Pet 1:20,21;

Reconstruction in YHWH’s Universal Project: Exegetical-Theological Study of Jeremiah 1:10 and Corresponding Passages, Indiana: Xlibris 2021, 34.

¹⁰ Carroll Stulmueller, ed., *The Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 784.

¹¹ As a middleman, the prophet intercedes to God on behalf of the people (Ex 32:13-13; Dt 9:25-27; Jer 47:6). God at some point had to ask Jeremiah not to waste his time interceding for the people (Jer 7:16-18). In other words, a prophet could be seen as a middleman between God and His people. He takes information from God to the people and takes supplications from the people of God.

comp. Hb 3:7; Acts 4:25; 28:25) and who pleads with God in favour of the people”¹².

The foretelling of future events was not a necessary but only an incidental part of the prophetic office. Prophecy is more than foretelling or prediction of what is to come. Though they announced the future, it was the immediate future. Prophets were not primarily predictors of future events of distant time; instead, they were the spokesmen for God to their own contemporaries. The great task assigned to the prophets was to proclaim the great moral and religious truths which relate to the character of God and foundational to His reign. In this way, the prophets correct moral, religious and social abuses of their time.

In speaking to God and the people, a prophet employs two kinds of persuasion: *criticizing* and *energising*¹³. The prophet criticizes the people for wrong doings, like, departing from the worship of God (Hos 2:7-15), reliance on the work of their hands (Mic 5:9-14; Jer 7:3-4), ill-treatment of one another and of institutions (Am 6:1-7; 8:4-7; Isa 58-10; 59:1-15; Mic 2:2-3). The prophet energises the people to visualise a better world that comes as a consequence to repentance and fidelity to God (Am 9:13; Joel 4:18; Mic 7:19-20; Is 11:6-9; 56:1-8; 66:18-23)¹⁴.

With the above definition or explication, in general, any one being a spokesman for God to man might thus be called a prophet. In that sense, these could qualify as prophets: Enoch, Abraham (Gn 20:7; Ex 7:1; Ps 105:15), the seventy elders of Israel (Num 11:16-29), Asaph and Jeduthun (1 Chr 25:3), Nathan, Ahijah, Iddo, Jehu, Elijah, Elisha, Oded, Shemaiah, Azariah, Hanani,

¹² Carroll Stuhlmueller, ed., *The Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 784.

¹³ W. Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Fortress 1978.

¹⁴ Carroll Stuhlmueller, ed., *The Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 785.

Jahaziel and Huldah who left no records of their utterances¹⁵. We also have prophetesses like Miriam and Deborah (Ex 15:20; Jdg 4:4). In that era, we have Moses and Samuel, who are accredited with writing (Dt 18:15; 34:10; Hos 12:13)¹⁶.

These dovetail into the Second Book of the kings. In a strict sense, the prophetic order as such began with Samuel. Colleges, “Schools of the prophets,” were instituted at Ramah, Bethel, Gilgal, Gibeah, and Jericho for the training of prophets, who were constituted a distinct order (1Sam 19:18-24; 2Kgs 2:3, 15; 4:38). In them, one finds mostly young men who were “sons” or “disciples” of the prophets (2Kgs 5:22; 9:1,4) who lived together at these different “schools” (2Kgs 4:38-41). These young men were taught not only the rudiments of secular knowledge, but they were brought up to exercise the office of prophet in relation to religio-socio and moral dimensions. These institutions and training continued till the close of the OT.

In New Testament times, the prophetic office was continued. John the Baptist is regarded as the bridge between the Old and New Testaments’ prophets (Lk 3). Jesus is frequently spoken of as a prophet (Lk 13:33; 24:19). He was and is the great Prophet of the Church; the fulfilment of prophecy. There was also in the Church a distinct order of prophets (1Cor 12:28; Eph 2:20; 3:5), who made new revelations from God. They differed from the “teacher”, whose office it was to impart truths already revealed. In nutshell, “Prophecy means, literally, speaking on behalf of God. A prophetic Church is a Church that speaks always on behalf of God, measuring everything against the coming kingdom of God. The Church’s preaching, however, is effective and

¹⁵ From the Book of Exodus and around the 14th cent B.C., we started recording notable prophets in Israel, who were more of oral prophets.

¹⁶ Cf. the Pentateuch and the Books of Samuel.

credible to the extent that the Church itself has been converted by it”¹⁷.

Prophecy

This is the certain prediction of future events that cannot be known by natural means. However, the biblical meaning of the Hebrew *hozeh* (*prophecy*) is more general, namely “vision” or “revelation interpreted.” Those who were called upon to prophesy did, indeed, on occasion also foretell future events, but the fulfillment of these predictions were divine confirmations of an authentic vision rather than the vision itself. Prophecies as predictions are consequently part of God’s supernatural providence. God, in whose sight all things are ever present, is able to communicate to His creatures from the abundance of His knowledge. He alone finally has this power, because certain foreknowledge of the contingent future is possessed only by Him. Prophecies are the words of His “prescience”, just as miracles are the work of his omnipotence.¹⁸

Misconstruing Prophets and Prophecy; Implications for Catholic Faith in Nigerian Context

Simony

Over the years, simony, which is any form of trafficking spiritual things for money,¹⁹ has been seen in the Church, especially with priests involved in “healing apostolate.” Some of these priests anoint indiscreetly with total disregard for the rules. Some of these abuses take the form of indiscriminate sale of dubious

¹⁷ Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*, Mineapolis, MN: Winston Press, Inc. 1980, 718.

¹⁸ John, Hardon, ed., *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, Bardstown, Eternal Life 2008, 446.

¹⁹ Donald Forton, *The Presbyterian Story: Origins and Progress of a Reformed Tradition*, PLC Publications, 2012, 219.

“religious items” like “back-to-sender soap, back-to-back candle and oils. Some priests have their own special oils blessed and sold by them at exorbitant prices.”²⁰

For Augustine Echema, to consult some of these priest-healers, sometimes, entails paying huge consultation fees, and this is already causing trouble in some dioceses. These abuses are nothing short of simony, which was part of what caused the Protestant revolt of Martin Luther in the 16th century. Unfortunately, also, some priests constitute themselves into personality cults, powerful priests with nicknames or stage names and give the impression that their oil, water or other sacramentals are special and more efficacious than the normal ones.²¹

In addition, simony could manifest when payments are obligatorily required to “light a candle”. In some parishes, candles are prayed for with the attachment of some amount of money for the blessings. This undue pecuniary attachment is one of the ways with which some of the “pastor healers and prosperity gospel preachers” operate. They teach that God’s blessings can be triggered by donations and candles known as “seeds of faith.”

Similarly, Nigerian Bishops have viewed “excessive monetary collections” with major concern as it “obscures the very essence of Catholic worship and is gradually eroding the true Catholic identity.”²² This could mature into another form of simony in our time because some priests involved intentionally rush the Eucharistic liturgy after over two hours of intensive dancing,

²⁰ Peter Uchu, “The Use and Abuse of Sacramentals with Special Reference to Anointing Oils” in Benedict Ukutegbe (ed.), *Abuses in the Liturgy and the Nigerian Context Today*, Benin: Floreat Systems, 2018, 147.

²¹ Augustine Echema, “Liturgical Celebration and Abuses in the Church: The Nigerian Experience” in Benedict Ukutegbe (ed.), *Abuses in the Liturgy and the Nigerian Context Today*, Benin: Floreat Systems, 2018, 23.

²² CBCN, *Communique of the Second Plenary Assembly 2016 at Domus Pacis Pastoral Center*, (Igoba, Akure, Ondo State, 8-16 September, 2016), www.warridiocese.org, accessed on December 6, 2024.

shouting, auctioneering, and selling of kolanuts with half of the congregation gone before Consecration. This is clearly seen in the rise of 2nd and 3rd collections in one particular Mass.

Another form of simony is seen in the current trafficking with tithes. Tithing is biblical (Gen 14:10; Lev 27:30-32; Num 18:21-24; Deut 14:22-29; Mal 3:8-10; Matt 23:23; Lk 11:42) but the exploitation of unsuspecting lay faithful and, at worst, extortion is condemned (Ez 34:1-10). The liturgy must not be used for any economic or selfish end. The primary purpose of all liturgical celebrations, especially the Holy Mass, is the glorification and sanctification of humanity.

Abuses of Eucharistic Adoration

The spread of Eucharistic adoration in Nigeria has witnessed a lot of abuses. Abuse in everyday language means “wrong or bad use of something” especially by disobeying the laws guiding that thing. In worship also, the inability of some people to follow laid down liturgical laws and practices lead to abuses. Eucharistic adoration, therefore, whether it is done in public or in private, is considered an abuse if it is not done in compliance with the liturgical laws and rites.

One common form of liturgical abuse of Eucharistic adoration is the dethronement of sacred silence, the cornerstone of Eucharistic worship. Silence is a salient part of adoration. There are certain moments of great silence during adoration sessions. However, the reverse is the case where there are hardly moments of silence during adoration. Either the priest is making “prophetic declarations” or the people are at the other side shouting, dancing and singing.²³

²³ Emmanuel Vandi, “Confronting the Rise of Pseudo-Ministers in the Nigerian Church,” in Gordian Umejuru Nacaths, ed., *Journal of African Theology: Eucharistic Adoration: History, Symbolism and Abuses, The Nigerian Situation* Vol 29, (2020), 138.

The carrying of the Blessed Sacrament in the monstrance outside the sanctuary or podium to walk among the Liturgical assembly, in order to bless them, is not the Church's recommended practice except on the specified solemnities and feasts of the Church that require a Eucharistic procession. Also, some priests put the consecrated Host in their cars while driving; not to move it from one place to another or visit the sick, but to serve as protection from accident or from attacks. Some carry the Eucharist in a monstrance to the homes of people for family cleansing. Some also carelessly forget the Eucharist in their pyx which they keep in the pidgin-hole of their cars.

Commercialization of Miracles

This manifests itself in many ways. Pastors of souls attach money to the prayers said for worshippers, without which no blessing or miracle will manifest or be reversed by God. The so-called "seed sowing" practice for expected miracles is yet another. Moreover, there is the practice of offering money to others, or better still, hiring people to engage in spiritual exercises like fasting on one's behalf for whatever reason, so as to get a miracle. These are different from the Church's normal tradition of offering stipends for Masses or Christian charity of praying for one another.

For these priests and their followers, there is also a paradigm shift in the idea of what moves God to work miracle. Miracles, although sometimes worked by God without any request by humans, can be solicited from God by humans through prayers. Whereas miracles are worked by God when one turns to God in faith with prayers, the trend in the contemporary Church shows that the average person believes God works miracles when money is given to the pastor and even, the nature of the miracles is determined by the amount donated. Hence, the financial commitment made by Christians in anticipation of a miracle or in gratitude for a miracle received, is misleadingly and falsely

emphasized today. All these culminate in the reduction of God to a miracle-working machine.

The Preference of Eucharistic Adoration over the Mass

Eucharistic adorations in the current setting have gradually won the attention of most Catholics rather than the Holy Mass. It has taken a new form and significance. Initially understood as part of the charismatic renewal which was heralded as a fresh reinvigoration by the Holy Spirit, it has mutated into an alternative that ridicules, despises and shows a disdain for traditional Catholicism. It is observed that people prefer “Adoration” because they get satisfaction from what is done. They often believe that during adoration, they obtain a more direct encounter with God than at Mass, where the priest serves as a middleman between the congregation and God. There are observed factors that contributed to the preference of Eucharistic adoration to Holy Mass, and they are accounted for below.

The Emergence and Spread of Prosperity Gospel

Prosperity Gospel is sometimes referred to as the health and wealth gospel or the gospel of success. It is a religious belief among some Christians that financial blessing is the will of God for them, and that faith, positive speech and donations will increase one’s material wealth. Prosperity gospel puts emphasis on Malachi 3:10–12 particularly, viewing the Bible as a contract between God and humans: if humans have faith in God, he will deliver his promises of security and prosperity. It is the view that the will of God for all Christians is to flourish in all areas of life. According to this interpretation, prosperity means having a holistic approach to human’s needs including his or her material wellbeing.²⁴

²⁴ Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*, Oxford University Press, 2013, 120.

The Juicy Monetary Benefits for Priests

From the point of view of the clergy and the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the resistance and upward progression of this new wave of Catholicism which prioritizes Eucharistic Adorations over the Holy Mass is largely traceable to the ratio of priests who propagate it for its monetary rewards.²⁵ There is no gainsaying the fact that Eucharistic adorations are well-oiled money-minting machines for these priests. Different from its real representation, these priests use Eucharistic Adorations for the propagation of the prosperity gospel. It allows them to push home the message of the prosperity gospel maintaining faith and generous donations will bring about and increase one's physical and material wealth. The donations made to God are left in the safekeeping of the priest who smiles home with his pocket filled and with confidence that the faithful will return with more to subscribe eternally to the supposed Abrahamic blessings of God.

For material gains, some of these priests are unwillingly to teach and speak about the primacy of the Holy Mass over the Eucharistic adorations. They rather use the Holy Mass as the opening ceremony for adorations and in some other parishes, the adoration is done during the homily devoid of the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. It is for these reasons that ecclesiastical hierarchy and many Catholic commentators believe that money is the major purpose, sustenance and growth of this new movement, which favours Eucharistic adorations over the Holy Mass. For them, the exclusion of any monetary interest for clergymen in this venture would curb the propagation of this movement permanently.

²⁵ Andrew Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits: Latin America's New Religious Economy*, Oxford University Press, 2003, 50.

A More African Model of Worship

Another argument proffered for the preference of Eucharistic adoration over Holy Mass is that the tempo and style of the celebration is more fitting to the African traditional mode of worship. The liturgical style employed at Eucharistic adorations nowadays is boisterous, enlivening, and most times involves great intensity.²⁶ The scene features loud music, dancing and clapping which are all structures of the traditional mode of worship. This style of worship allows both for the emotional and physical satisfaction of the faithful. The African traditional mode of worship is a lot less contemplative. It allows for a more active participation of the faithful and the making of joyful noises. It therefore resonates with the penchant of the African for rhythmic music and for physical expression in worship.

Religion; An Answer to Existential Problems

Closely linked to the reason for the prevalence of Eucharistic adorations is the Marxist idea that religion is the opium of the people. Marx sees religion as a coping mechanism for people in the severest conditions of life.²⁷ No other place does this seem true than in the Nigerian situation. The standard of living in Nigeria is at an all-time low. There is crass, unfathomable poverty, with many people having no access to good living conditions. The safety of life and property is also not guaranteed. This bleak situation exposes people to the harshest of life and no means of escaping the vicious cycle of poverty and bad leadership. Within this societal milieu, the security of life and any sort of progression in standard of life is therefore considered to involve some divine intervention since people have lost belief in

²⁶ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, London: Heinemann, 1969, 40.

²⁷ Karl Marx, ed., "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," Early Writings, Tom Bottomore McGraw-Hill, 1963, 243.

the workings and services of their fellow men. For these reasons, people resort to Eucharistic adorations as the easiest way to be united with God.

“Miracle-Seeking” Christians

Presently, some Christians in our churches are majorly miracle-seekers who are always on the move. They are quick to abandon their parish to another parish where “things are happening”, in their language and expression. They are also quick to leave the Catholic Church to any Pentecostal church for immediate solution to their problems. This reality is what Emmanuel Abuh refers to as “dual belongingness”- a situation whereby some Catholics fulfill their Sunday obligation by attending the Eucharistic celebration and later on, and even within the weekdays, visit Pentecostal churches for ‘revival ministries’.²⁸

The scribes and Pharisees demanded for signs from Jesus. They said to him, “What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you?” (Jn 6:30). But Jesus would not use signs to prove his messiahship (Matt 12:38-42; Lk 11:29-32). Like the time of Jesus, some people in our contemporary society, go in search of signs and wonders. They want success in their undertakings but are not ready to work hard for it. In their quest for material breakthroughs, they frequent miracle centers, perform religious rituals, pay tithes in order to attract God’s favours in terms of material blessings. This is indeed a distortion of the image of God, who cannot be manipulated to do one’s will.

²⁸ Valentine Ibe and Simon Faeren, “Combatting the Aggressive Effects of Pentecostalism on Catholic Orthodoxy and Morals in Africa: A Theological Evaluation,” in Emmanuel Nwafor, ed., *Nacaths Journal of African Theology: The Church in Africa and the Challenges of Culture* Vol. 27, (2018), 57.

The Cult of Followership

It has been observed that some Catholics are seen idolizing some particular priests who in their rating, are spirit-filled priests of God. As such, people come to Church not just to worship God but to hear from these priests. For them, these priests are the “God” whom they see and they believe hook, line and sinker whatever these priests tell them. Hence, some of the Catholics in Nigeria are nomadic Catholics who move from parish to parish after the diocesan priests’ placements and locations, in attendance of the adoration sessions conducted by these “supposed spirit-filled” priests.

Priests and the Quest for Materialism

It is a truism that the scriptures record that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living from the gospel (1Cor 9:14). However, the rate at which some of these priests desire and accumulate wealth is very alarming. Nowadays, Christians rely on God for their sustenance and as such adhere to the injunctions of their priests so as to be richly blessed by God because the society and the government have failed them. As such, they fall for anything they are being told that will amount to God’s blessing. Seeing the gullible state of the people, some priests take advantage of them. They are the insatiable priests who want to be known as wealthy and popular priests. They want to own houses, schools, fleet of expensive cars, put on expensive wears, etc. One finds it difficult to differentiate between such priests and ordinary business tycoons in the society because they hardly carry their priestly identity around.

As a result of the insatiable nature of some of these priests, they venture into adoration, since for them, it is the easiest means of accumulating wealth. Without possessing the charisma, they do all sorts of things; liturgical aberrations, simony and the promotion of prosperity gospels. Also, being aware of the gains

from social media owners, these insatiable priests sell themselves and their practices through these media spaces; Facebook, Tiktok, Instagram, etc. They pay deaf ears to the warnings of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria on the indiscriminate use of the social media by Catholic priests.²⁹ In this regard, Augustine Echema warns: "You are not here to acquire wealth"³⁰ This is because the Catholic Church as expressed in her Laws holds that clergymen are not to venture into private business without the express permission of their bishops or superiors.³¹ It is therefore necessary for priest to retrace their root to what the Church holds following the example of Christ.

The Way forward

Proper Catechesis

Liberation of Catholics from the Pentecostal craze worldview through knowledge, is very essential. A catechesis that is transformative in nature and not just informative, where the faithful not just repeat the words of the Catechism with the aim of receiving the sacraments, but one that immerses oneself in the mysteries which one professes. In the parishes, there should be days for catechetical classes where the priests teach the people the right Catholic doctrine. Also, there should be ongoing formation for priests on Catechesis, liturgy and other theological disciplines.

Every Catholic ought to be aware that the liturgy is not anyone's personal or private business. It is rather a participation in the life

²⁹CBCN, "Bishops Against Proliferation of Priests' 'Private Ministries'" and Misuse of Social Networks, *Communique of the Second Plenary Assembly of 2024*, Auchi, Nigeria August 22-30, www.zenit.org/05/09/2024 accessed Saturday 15th December, 2024.

³⁰ Chibuike Ekezie "17 Priests Ordained for Aba Diocese," *Rex Newspaper*, Vol. 414, no. 463, July 14, 2024, 10.

³¹ *Code of Canon Law*, Kenya: Paulines, 2013, 286.

of Christ by the Church; and so, it cannot rightly be altered with songs and gestures that should ordinarily enhance the liturgy. As such, among other things that characterize the Catholic liturgy are order, solemnity and harmony.

Checkmate of the Priests' Pastoral Activities by the Bishops

With the latest happenings in the Church with regard to liturgical aberration, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria should checkmate the priests' pastoral activities. They are to find a subtle way of moderating these priests who are bent on importing the Pentecostal manner of worship into the Catholic liturgy and mete out with pastoral paternity, those canonical directives contained in canons 752, 1371 and 1381. When such corrective measures are observed, it will serve as a deterrent to many.

Going Back to the Catholic Roots

St. Paul warns that we should not be disturbed and carried about by every wind of doctrine, and those things that deceive us into error (Eph 4:14). Hence, in this era of secular ideological opinions, relativism and importation of all sorts of teachings into the Catholic doctrine, it is pertinent that Catholics retrace their steps by going back to the authentic roots of Catholic faith and identity which have served the Church so well for over two thousand years.

Deepening the Catholic Spirituality

Catholics are to deepen their personal spiritual life in the light of our Catholic tradition; to move from infantile spirituality to a solid spirituality borne out of personal conviction. It is easy that our spirituality can become skin deep. When the times are rough and tough, or when faced with the challenges of sickness, business failure, barrenness of all sorts, etc., some Catholics resort to the idea that "the people in the village are after me spiritually"; superstitiously attributing everything to witchcraft

and devil attack, giving the Holy Spirit only a secondary position as a fire brigade fighter, hence the “Holy Ghost - fire” syndrome. Little wonder there is such a drift by many to newfound prayer houses, so-called ministries whose operators claim to offer instant miraculous solutions.

Practice and hand on the Faith

Various prayers have been formulated to facilitate our spiritual journey: morning prayer, midday prayer, evening prayer and night prayer, the Angelus prayer, the Holy Mass, the Liturgy of the Hours, Eucharistic Benediction and adoration, *Lectio Divina*, Rosary, the divine mercy devotion and so on. Catholics are encouraged to hand on these practices in the family and places of work, and those who can, to write books or pamphlets explaining clearly the misunderstood doctrines or traditions. Catholics should study basic theology and even advanced theology; volunteer to be Catechists, choir members, church wardens, instructors of the Catholic faith, etc.

Sacramental Life and Pious Devotions

The Catholic life is shaped and sustained by the sacraments, with the Holy Eucharist being the source and summit of our faith. Apart from regular participation in the Eucharistic celebration, a Catholic should be known by his or her devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints.

Also, in the Catholic Church, there are so many pious sodalities: Infant Jesus Sodality, St. Anthony of Padua, Catholic Biblical Instructors’ Union, St. Rita Sodality, and so on. Hence, Catholics are encouraged to be part of these spiritual sodalities and associations to aid them in their spiritual life and knowledge of the Catholic faith.

Social Entrepreneurship

A social enterprise is a business created to further a social purpose in a financially sustainable way. The aim is to provide a product or service with measurable social impact and address a problem that affects many people. As such, the creation of business investments by the dioceses will reduce idleness among priests and reduce the overreliance on the people of God, because he who pays the piper, dictates the tune. It is high time priests became social entrepreneurs and venture into impact investing with the permission of their bishops and superiors. They are to go into agriculture, skill acquisitions like sewing of clerical wears, manufacturing of pews and seats and studying and teaching other courses that are not clerical, for instance, medicine, pharmacy and nursing without losing sight of their priestly vocation and pastoral assignments. The dioceses are to have investments like filling stations, hospitals, diocesan farms, shopping malls and so on so as to become less dependent on the people and equally create job opportunities for the Christians.

Conclusion

The idea of a prophet as one who has the ability to foretell the future has beclouded the mindset of most people in Nigeria. This has led many Christians (Catholics inclusive) to cherish very little other key functions of the priest such as the teaching of the Word of God and the celebrating of the sacraments. Such people now look for priests who are diviners, fortune-tellers and problem-solvers. This has led some priests into aberration in the liturgy.

Catholicism is a balanced Christianity. The belief in the Holy Mass, Real Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and the Holy Rosary need not be underestimated. Granted that there are ecclesiastically recognized and approved sacred places and pilgrimage centres, there is no need to sleep on crusade grounds or travel miles for God to hear prayers. Buying of branded oil for

anointing is not necessary either. The three sacred oils of catechumen, oil of the sick and chrism blessed by the bishops at Chrism Masses and used by priests on the faithful are enough. It is true, that the Bible encourages tithe payments but Catholic tradition and teaching do not emphasize tithe and sowing of seeds as conditions *sine-qua-non* for God's answers to prayers. Faith in whom and what is believed forms a strong base for the Christian life.

Consequently, addressing the misconstrual of prophets and prophecy is essential for preserving the integrity of Catholic faith in Nigeria, fostering mature Christianity, and enabling the Church to engage prophetically with Nigerian societal needs without compromising doctrinal fidelity. As such, this article does not boast to give a final solution to the problem but serves as springboard for further discussions on the theme. Whichever, strong faith in Jesus Christ remains the fundament and good Christian life manifests the faith.