

CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT: INTERROGATING THE CATHOLIC PRIESTLY FORMATION AS A RESPONSE TO PENTECOSTALISM IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Pentecostalism is a brand of Christianity that has not been substantially systematized in comparison with Catholicism. Its preoccupation with demons, witches, glossolalia, visions, dreams, tithes, miracles, vigorous vocal prayers, prosperity, literal biblical interpretation, and prophecy among its religious expressions and the lack of a centralized control authority has contributed to its proliferation such that its commercialisation has become a moral burden on Christianity in Nigeria. Therefore, Pentecostalism needs an appropriate logical response. The purpose of this study is to explore an avenue through which the Catholic Church can offer such a logical response to Pentecostalism. Gathering data through participant observations and interviews, it was discovered that Pentecostalism has been attractive to some Catholics for several reasons. The study found out that the Catholic Charismatic Renewal group that exhibits Pentecostal religious expressions exists in the Catholic Church, but not all Catholics have embraced it. It was suggested that the incorporation of Pentecostalism and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal into the curriculum of the Catholic priestly training would serve to equip the scholar as a change agent in Nigerian social environment. The paper invites the Catholic Clergy to lead a religious reorientation in Nigeria.

Key words: Catholic Priestly Formation, Pentecostalism, Witches, Prosperity, Catholic Charismatic Renewal

Introduction

The current reality about the Nigerian socio-religious environment is the competition for physical space and the souls of people by proselytising religions (Islam and Christianity). The Bible reports Jesus telling his followers, “You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world. A city built on a mountain cannot be hidden” (Matt. 5:13, 14, Christian Community Bible). Hence, it is expected that the recent upsurge in the number of churches in Nigeria would lead to a virtuous social environment, but the reverse is the case.

Pentecostalism is a brand of Christianity that claims to bring about holiness of life in its adherents and thereby lead to a virtuous social environment. The Nigerian social environment has witnessed an astronomical increase in the different brands of Pentecostal churches laying emphasis on demons, witches, casting and binding of demons, visions, dreams, miracles, prophecy, tithes, prosperity gospel, etc. with serious consequences of such religious expressions and beliefs on the perception of Christianity and pastors.

Although Catholicism does not deny the existence of demons, visions, prophecy, or the collection of tithes, some Catholics have often been reactionary to Pentecostalism rather than taking proactive measures to enlighten people who seek satisfactory socio-spiritual solutions and most especially to communicate Catholic religious experiences in a way that will curtail the drifting of Catholics to Pentecostalism. The lack of appropriate response has caused some Catholics to shift their religious allegiance to the Pentecostal churches.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) in 2004 issued a pastoral document titled *I Chose You*. The document re-emphasises the gift of the ministerial priesthood and the responsibility entrusted to the priests to treasure the gift. Discussing the challenge of the modern world of change, the document observes, "No executive or leader today can simply rely on the tools and training of the previous generation" (n. 30). While *I Chose You* recognises change as a factor that affects the priesthood in contemporary times, it fails to take a proactive measure to train scholars who must respond to Pentecostalism, a rapid phenomenon that is redefining Christianity in Nigeria.

Condemnatory judgement such as Pentecostalism is a "faulty religion" "a defective movement in Christianity based on the deception that members especially, leaders, know and speak the mind of God" (Ibiyemi) does not lead to a genuine religious conversation in the contemporary world. The current study posits that catholic priestly training needs to be interrogated as a response to Pentecostalism. As scholars, Catholic priests need to study Pentecostalism in all ramifications including its philosophy and religious expressions that make it attractive most especially to some Catholics. It is hoped that such knowledge will benefit the priest, his flock, and help in religious reorientation in Nigeria. The aim is to help the CBCN discover a practical solution covertly styled "new tool and training" in the document *I Chose You*. The study hopes to achieve this purpose by answering the following research questions:

1. What makes Pentecostalism attractive to some Catholics?
2. Does the catholic priestly formation have effects on the catholic religious expression?
3. Are there any negative practices of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal that make some priests not receptive to it?

4. Will the inclusion of Pentecostalism and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal into the curriculum of catholic priestly training jeopardise the catholic priestly training?
5. How best can the Catholic Church respond to the Pentecostal phenomenon in Nigeria?

The study hypothesised that the curriculum of the Catholic Priestly training needs to be reviewed in order to address the Pentecostal phenomenon in Nigeria.

Research Methods and Methodology

The purposive sampling method was adopted in order to choose participants for the research. The purposive sampling, also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling is a form of non-probability sampling in which researchers rely on their own judgment when choosing members of the population to participate in their study (Foley). The sampling method was adopted because the selection of eligible participants for the study was not based on probability. Data were collected through structured and unstructured in-depth interviews (face-to-face, telephone conversation, social media applications (WhatsApp and Messenger)) and participant observations. Interviews were conducted among Catholics (priests and laity) as the focus group in Ilorin, Ijebu-Ode, Zaria, Sokoto, and Kontagora Dioceses in addition to Catholics in Kaduna and Lagos Archdiocese. The study was a description of the perception of Catholics about Pentecostalism and how the Catholic Church should respond. Hence, the study adopted the qualitative research design rather than the quantitative research design since it sought to find answers to the “hows and whys” of the phenomenon under investigation (DSJ research). Findings were critically analysed and qualitatively generalised.

Pentecostalism: An Exposition

Pentecostalism is a collection of different Christian groups demonstrating spiritual experiences, such as speaking in tongues, as a mark of the presence of the Holy Spirit in them (Enang 43). Broadly speaking, Pentecostalism is regarded as a religious phenomenon that emphasises the presence and activities of the Holy Spirit in dynamic ways in the lives of Christians. Pentecostals insist that baptism of the Holy Spirit is a second experience after one's conversion and this experience acts to reform the Church and makes it courageous to confront the challenges of the society (Ojo). This shows that a study of Pentecostalism is apposite for the catholic priest.

As a movement towards the activities of the Holy Spirit, Pentecostalism has no dogma since it believes that the Holy Spirit inspires its adherents directly in all that is necessary for salvation and it teaches the possibility of living a sinless life while on earth. Pentecostals do not recognise teaching authority of the church (*Magisterium*) because of its belief that the Holy Spirit interprets the Bible privately to its adherents (Ogunu). Notwithstanding, Faith healing,

holiness of life, evangelism, emphasis on material possession as a mark of God's favour or blessing, prophecy, repeated prayers and emphasis on deliverance, prayer against witches and wizards, attacks on the Catholic Church, payment of tithes in order to receive God's blessing, etc are some of the Pentecostal practices and beliefs in Nigeria.

The development of Pentecostalism is traced to the Azusa Street revival of 1906 at Los Angeles followed by the early 1960s revival among Episcopalians in the United States that spilled to other Protestant and the Catholic Churches. Since these Pentecostal-style worshippers remained inside their respective denominations, they are called Charismatics. The third phase of Pentecostalism that began in 1970s resulted in independent churches (Tavish).

In Nigeria, Pentecostalism began with the *Aladura* (people of prayer) between 1920s and late 1960s (Adeboye). Adeboye asserts that this phase has no direct link with the 1906 Azusa revival mentioned by Tavish earlier. The *Aladura* includes the Cherubim and Seraphim Churches (established 1925), the Church of the Lord (established 1929), and the Celestial Church of Christ (established 1947). They are generally referred to as African Initiated/Independent Churches (AICs). Baur reveals that at the onset of the great epidemic of 1918, people were frustrated with the inefficacy of the medical help from the missionaries. Therefore, they gathered in prayer groups called *Aladura* (406). That is, they resorted to prayer and appealed to God for healing and deliverance from the epidemic. The distinguishing marks of the *Aladura* are fervent prayers, spirit possession, and public evangelism.

The Niger Delta revival of Garrick Sokari Braide (1915 -1917) and the Ilesha revival of Joseph Ayo Babalola of 1930s are regarded as 'Pentecostal manifestations'; it is believed that when Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) of Joseph Ayo Babalola had contact with the American Faith Tabernacle, the CAC incorporated Biblical inerrancy with the *Aladura* trademarks (Adeboye). Therefore, the opinion of Adeboye corresponds with that of Idowu who insists that the CAC marks the establishment of Nigerian Pentecostalism (14).

Nevertheless, the second phase of Nigerian Pentecostalism started through campus fellowship in 1970s and 1980. This phase includes the establishment of Deeper Life Bible Church led by W.F. Kumuyi, Living Faith Church founded by David Oyedepo, Church of God Mission established by late Benson Idahosa (Adedibu 4). The third phase started in the early 1990s with the explosion of independent churches such as Redeemed Evangelical Mission, World of Life Bible Church, Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, etc (Adeboye).

Pentecostalism can no longer be wished away in Nigeria; it is attractive to some Catholics for various reasons. Enang discovers some Catholic seminarians have taken some Pentecostal pastors as role models in the style of preaching, finding solution to spiritual attack, and possession of material things (279-283). Emphasis on healing and care for the sick, ability to deal with evil spirits and witches, search for palpable salvation, desire to know the scripture

and the Word of God better, attractive and persuasive preaching, quest for spiritual experiences of another kind, strong sense of brotherhood, mutual help of a material kind, lively and dynamic worship, etc are some reasons that make Pentecostalism attractive to some Catholics (Ogunu). In addition, lack of proper programme for the youths, decline in spiritual formation in the Catholic Seminaries, inadequate pastoral care for members, and lack of proper catechesis are some features that attract some Catholics to Pentecostal churches (Ogundipe).

Personal observations and fieldwork reveal that most pastors started independent churches by sharing foodstuffs to poor villagers in order to lure them from their churches. They posed as “Messiahs” who could provide “Stomach infrastructure” and thereby convince some ignorant and helpless people that they were the new “Messiahs” who were sent to solve all the problems militating against the peoples’ progress. Such narrative helps them to succeed in causing schisms in most mainline churches and among families as they often succeed in sowing the idea of witchcraft in families in their attempts to present themselves as the better means of “economic, social, and spiritual salvation”. Most often than not, some Pentecostals create “demons” even when they are absent. Like in traditional African societies, some Pentecostals have a penchant for spiritualising every problem.

Pentecostalism has deepened and reawakened the love for the Bible and forced Catholics to find Biblical supports for their doctrines and devotional practices (Ukpong). It has been shown that “owning a church has become a big business- *pastopreneurs* are on the rise in Nigeria” (Oderinde). Pastopreneurs have invested the proceeds of the ministry into businesses such as printing, education ranging from the primary school to the university, hospital, etc in line with the theory of Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. The list of Pentecostal churches that have established their tertiary institutions in Nigeria have been documented (Omonijo, Nwodo, Uche, Ezechukwu).

Pentecostal pastors present their individual religious experiences as dogmas for their faithful while they vehemently accuse the Catholic Church of being dogmatic. The lack of tradition or deposit of faith as a guide makes the pastors to sometimes misinterpret the Bible and thereby use God to satisfy their feelings as situations warrant. This reality has brought confusions into the socio-religious environment in Nigeria and it needs scholarly engagement. Moreover, one should note that Pentecostalism is not all about negativity since it has inspired several people such as Pastor Enoch Adeboye, Pastor W. F. Kumuyi, Bishop David Oyedepo and a host of others who have contributed to the development of the social environment.

Interrogating the Catholic Priestly Formation as a Response to Pentecostalism in Nigeria

The Catholic Church places a high premium on the process of training future priests. Hence, the Church sets forth some universal regulations that should be followed in the training of priests who are very important in the renewal of the Church. The regulations allow Episcopal

conferences to train their priests to suit their particular pastoral requirements and circumstances (*OptatamTotius* 1). *OptatamTotius* emphasises areas of training such as Bible, liturgy, servant leadership, interreligious dialogue, ecumenism, and others (4, 16) while excluding demonology or angelology, but it does not preclude the inclusion of such courses nor does it forbid training on conducting revivals, deliverance, and vigils. In fact, the document recommends that there should be adaptation of training to suit particularity since there are particular pastoral concerns in different societies in the world.

It is this non-appreciation of particularity (local customs and values) that reportedly contributed to the protests and schism that led to the genesis of African Independent Churches (AICs) (Idowu 19). It is reported that earlier European missionaries to Yorubaland told the people to renounce amulets and charms, but they failed to provide the people with better alternatives that could protect them against the adversity of malevolent spirits (Idowu 19). Therefore, Baur submits that “until the African’s need for relief from sickness and protection from evil are taken care of, new independent churches will not cease to spring up” (408). This prophecy statement of Baur has been the situation in Nigeria. There is a proliferation of independent churches attempting to save human souls while neglecting the bodies. There seems to be confusion about what Christianity actually means in Nigeria.

The Catholic Church takes pride in producing scholars who are supposed to contribute their quota to improve the social environment through presenting logical and critical alternatives to what people hear from the Pentecostal pulpits. Such critical alternatives can only be provided when a critical and logical study of the philosophy of Pentecostalism is understood. Therefore, the current study opines that the curriculum of the Catholic Priestly training needs a review in order to address the Pentecostal phenomenon in Nigeria.

An enquiry into what makes Pentecostalism attractive to some Catholics revealed that some Catholics were attracted by different reasons such as lively and attractive worship style, praise and worship, helping members to secure employments, etc. In fact, “Pentecostals in diasporas fulfil a role the older generational churches are unable to fill” (Odeyemi) by providing accommodation and extending a hand of fellowship to immigrants among other positive things. All respondents agreed that the catholic priestly formation has effects on the catholic religious expression. However, it was noted, “The Catholic priestly formation especially in Nigeria needs a reform to meet present-day challenges such as pastoral care for young people which it seems to be short of” (Baba Ahmed).

Having been recognised as a pious society in the Catholic Church, one wonders why some priests are cold towards the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR). Findings showed that some members of the CCR often disobey priests. Some lay claims to unverified prophecies, and they do not appreciate Marian devotions including the Rosary, but they emphasise baptism

of the Holy Spirit rather than sacrament of baptism as the Catholic Church teaches. It was also reported that some members of CCR believe that they are “holier than the priests or know the Bible more than the priests” (Umoru Michael). Other charges against CCR include being an easier avenue to start independent church. It was reported, “They see themselves as the Pentecostals in the Catholic Church. Some operate with different powers not known by the Catholic Church. They love themselves rather than all Church members” (Chelsea Christian). It is advisable that CCR members operate within the rules established by the Catholic Church.

Moreover, most respondents believed that the inclusion of Pentecostalism and the CCR into the curriculum of the catholic priestly training will not jeopardise the catholic priestly training, but “it will equip the priests to tackle the challenges of contemporary religious issues” (Olododo Daniel). In fact, “The study of Pentecostalism and Charismatic gifts should be part of courses in the seminary. This could be followed by the life in the Spirit Seminar” (Mohammed Sule). However, one respondent had a contrary opinion, “Pentecostalism is a neo-pagan religion that can destroy the essence of the true faith” (Precious Papa). Moreover, the suggestion that “the formation should go beyond academic knowledge to spiritual formation for a genuine encounter with Jesus” (Kofi Mohammed) was also noted.

In order to find an appropriate response to the Pentecostal phenomenon in Nigeria, respondents wanted the Catholic Church to be more spiritual and to create accessible platforms to the youths. Meanwhile, Catholic priests were advised to continually teach sound doctrines and dispel ignorance from the mind of people since demonic oppression feeds on fear and ignorance (Kojo Victor, Gabriel Jesus, and KpadaTifin). The Catholic Church is encouraged to stick to its rules; it should be truthful at all times, to identify with members and expose its priests to legal training in order to prevent the Church from unnecessary litigations (Chelsea Christian), and the Church should invest more in people than in structures. Other suggestions included proper catechesis and Bible study outside the Mass for the youths who are easily carried away by innovations and emotions.

The Catholic Church needs to emphasise the positive aspects of Pentecostalism like love for the Word of God, preaching and public witnessing, and improvement on the musical instruments in the churches (Irawo Ojo, Ologo Chukwu). It is expedient that the Catholic priests give pastoral assistance and encouragement to the members of CCR (Mohammed Sule) because they are very useful for the Church. In addition, more than mere issuing guidelines for the CCR in Nigeria as it did in 1986 in order to forestall schism (Schineller 174), the study aligns with majority of the respondents to suggest that the CBCN needs to incorporate the study of CCR into the curriculum of the Catholic seminaries in Nigeria.

Conclusion

One of the effects of competition is innovation. The Catholic Church is in a competitive religious market in Nigeria and it needs to satisfy its members who are its customers. The study interrogated the Catholic Priestly Formation as a response to Pentecostalism in Nigeria. Answers to the research questions were gathered through participant observations and interviews. The study strictly adhered to the ethical standard of anonymity.

The study discovered that Pentecostalism is a challenge to Catholicism and that the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR), which operates like Pentecostal churches, exists in the Catholic Church as a pious society. Most participants are ignorant about Catholicism, Religion, and Spirituality. Such ignorance affects the social environment negatively and this requires that Catholic Priests use the Mass media and social media more often to enlighten people as Rev. Fr Oluoma and Rev. Fr George Ehusani of the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja have been doing. As scholars, priests have obligation to mentally deconstruct people who have been fed with half-truths concerning Catholicism and to logically engage Pentecostals in order to improve the Nigerian social environment that is saturated with religion without piety.

The study discovered that when it comes to witchcraft, some priests tend to shy away from it or they treat it as superstitious. Since some priests do not believe in the existence of demons or witchcraft, some interviewees opined that something is lacking in the priestly training that sets some priests against the CCR, which is believed to be potent to tackle demonic problems and have prevented some Catholics from leaving the Church. Hence, some Catholics revere priests, such as Rev. Fr. Ejike Mbaka of Enugu Diocese, who are termed “charismatic” as being more spiritual than those who do not.

The frosty relationship between some priests and CCR members in some parishes is due to the refusal of some of the members of the CCR to accept the Marian doctrines and their tendency to downplay the time-tested tradition of the Catholic Church. Although, some Catholics still believe that “Pentecostalism is a distorted process in Christianity that has nothing to offer Catholicism” (Precious Papa), majority believe that it is better to study Pentecostalism and learn from its positive aspects. The research believes that the Catholic Church does not need to devalue its theology in order to study what makes Pentecostalism and CCR thrive. The study of CCR, Pentecostalism, and Life in the Spirit Seminar will equip the priests better as a change agent in his social environment.

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