

# Pentecostal Hermeneutics and the Commercialization of the Gospel Message in Nigeria

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## **Abstract**

*The call by Jesus to preach the gospel to every nation is a holistic assignment for every believer. This assignment is dynamic and has resulted to various interpretations and applications in different parts of the world. In Nigeria, Pentecostal movements seem to have burst into the scene challenging the temper of Christian practice, devotional bastions, revered politics, liturgies, and muted or liberalized dimensions of Christian ethics. In so doing some preachers have exploited certain enabling backgrounds to commercialize the gospel; such backgrounds as the influence of secular politics, the underpinning world view of Africa, economic depression, and the improvement in mass media constitute enabling factors for commercialization of the gospel in Nigeria. This paper has studied Pentecostal explosion in Nigeria in its historical trend, and the phenomenon of commercialization of the gospel message, and has linked commercialization of the gospel message with Pentecostal hermeneutics that tended to exploit the avenue of increased and unregulated use of mass media for*

*the purpose of evangelism and the socio-economic and political situations of the country to dupe innocent and gullible audience. The paper, therefore recommends that the practice of televangelism should be re-examined, and that the government should extend the fight against corruption into the Churches by regulating, not only the rate at which Churches acquired their private cable networks, but also the registration of new religious movements since their proliferation has not solve the problem of insecurity, poverty, sickness and uncertainties in the country.*

## **Introduction**

In the last few decades an important development has occurred in Nigerian Christianity. This is the commercialization of the gospel message by some religious groups, Churches and ministries, nearly all of them Pentecostals. This new initiatives are evident particularly in major cities, but are increasingly obvious in rural areas too. This new phenomenon in African Christianity is promoted through revivals, crusades, healing ministries, and mass media. This new wave in

Nigeria Christianity, for example, take over on Sundays the school rooms, cinema houses and hotel conference rooms of Nigeria's major cities. Frequently, this new wave of Christianity in Nigeria is dismissed as economic ventures on the part of resourceful entrepreneurs.

Marshal (1993) says that one of the most remarkable trends of the last decade among the Christian population of Southern Nigeria has been the dramatic rise of the so-called "Charismatic" or "Pentecostal" movements and the increasing rate at which these movements tend to commercialize the gospel message. Literally thousands of new Churches and evangelical groups have cropped up in cities and towns, forming business-based religious movements which are rapidly becoming a powerful new social and religious force.

According to Ugwueye (2002), "religion is now business which borders on commercialization or financial endeavours" (p. 221). It is now competitive as many miracle workers advertise themselves and the nature of their miracles in radios and television houses, calling people to jettison their old ways of solving problems and seek miracles. All the agents of commercialization of the gospel go to the media houses (Print and Electronic) to sell their products of good health, to the sickness infested society, security to a people with security uncertain future,

prosperity and financial breakthrough to a poverty ridden people.

Mills (1976) observes that this trivialization and commercialization of the things of faith is a more general phenomenon in our day. In his words, "today the most immediate threat to faith is rarely evil or radical doubt; what should trouble us more is the astonishing rate with which the things of faith may now be diminished, trivialized, commercialized and appropriated" (p. 98). It may have even reached to the sad point, as Kolade – Otitoju (2009) alleges, that Churches are now increasingly set up solely as business enterprises. He decries:

And increasingly, Churches are being set up solely as business concerns rather than to win souls or to depopulate the kingdom of darkness, as Pentecostals like to say. Many pastors are no better than common thieves who turn to the job because they cannot find any other job to do. (p. 19).

This paper, therefore, is an attempt to promote investigation, discussion and debate into this question of new wave of Pentecostal explosion and its consequent commercialization of the gospel message in Nigeria. There is no doubt that in some Churches, especially the Pentecostal groups, financial motive is moving Men of God as much as the spirit is, and however cynical such comments may appear, there is a strong element of truth in them. However,

embracing some sort of manipulation thesis in describing the rise of these Churches does not explain why people continue to flock to them and give their money willingly. It is simplistic, as well as patronizing, to assume, as such approach would imply, that people are simply duped by clever and unscrupulous men.

This paper will also examine how changes in the society have overtime influenced religious market, by establishing a connection between Nigeria's social, political and economic condition and the rise of Pentecostal groups and gospel commercialization. This religious trend reflects the shifts in popular culture in the social, political, and economic spheres. The get rich quick syndrome in Nigeria has no bounds in every area of live. This sad episode has manifested itself in politics, business, and all other sphere of the economy. More worrisome is the fact that the syndrome has found its way to the sphere of religion. The economic hardship and political instability in Nigeria, the threat of sickness and diseases, the zeal without knowledge to expand the kingdom of God, and the level of social uncertainties in Nigeria, all have led to the commercialization of the gospel message. The idea is that a Church where God does not perform miracles is a dead Church. This idea has been preached in different Churches especially in Pentecostal movements to justify the commercialization of the gospel.

Even within the mainline Churches, Church programmes and activities have taken a commercial dimension. Priests now initiate white – elephant projects and cajole the conscience of their congregations to donate generously to God's work with promises that God will certainly bless a cheerful giver. Such projects may include magnificent residential buildings for the parish priests, luxurious cars for the clergy, commercial shops that will generate money for the Church, and even sometimes there are special offerings on special Sundays, earmarked as pastor's Sundays and so on. Bazaars are now being organized with such pomp that resembles political jamborees.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The term "Pentecostal" is derived from "Pentecost", a Greek word for the Jewish feast of the weeks which commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostal theology was shaped by two movements: it grew out of the Western Holiness and higher life revival movement. Early Pentecostals understood Holy Spirit baptism as a second blessing and speaking in tongues as the physical evidence for this blessing. It is a revivalist religious movement within Christianity that places special emphasis on the direct personal experience of God through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. According to Kalu (2008), some Pentecostals insist that a crucial grace gift that serves as an initial evidence of born again is glossolalia,

from two Greek words for tongue and speaking. Believers acquire the power to speak in known or unknown tongues. Anderson (2008) notes the primacy of the experience of the third person of the Trinity and the practice of the charismatic gifts.

Modern Pentecostalism is traceable to a former Methodist minister, Charles F. Parham. According to Achunike (2009) it was as a result of Parham's preaching on the second blessings as fundamentally taught by John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist group of Christianity, that this organization started.

Hermeneutics as seen by Mbaegbu (2012) is "an attempt to unearth, unravel, and bring to light that which has been hidden in the background of any metaphysical cosmological and eschatological assumptions" (p. 3). Hornby (1999) defines hermeneutics as the study or theory of the method of interpretation of text, especially holy texts.

Pentecostal hermeneutics claim to recover and practice the extra-ordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit as were mentioned in the book of Acts of the Apostles which they say have been downplayed by most of the mainline Churches. Sometimes these groups of Christian organization are addressed in Africa as New Religious movements. The newness is evident in their doctrinal

and ideological shift as compared with the missionary faith.

Cox (cited by Kalu, 2008) approaches Pentecostal hermeneutics through the prism of history of religions: that they recover a primal spirituality comprising primal speech and utterances, primal piety in primal hope in the expectancy of miracles, supernatural intervention and the parousia. A basic characteristic of Pentecostal hermeneutics is to set to work the message of the mainline Churches and exploits the translated Bible to recover those elements that were ignored, lost, or muted in the process of institutionalization.

Pentecostal hermeneutics tend to provide a specific lens for reading the Bible differently. It focuses on the goal of abundant life. The religious discourse counters the instrumentalist emphasis on deprivation, pathology, pessimisms and externality and recast the story with Christian idiom of hope, optimism, participation in Christ's victory, intercultural theology, anti structure, racial nationalism and muscular evangelism. It makes use of colourful language and hyperbole but deploys charismatic resources to craft the tools of hope in daily living.

Pentecostalism has made giant strides in the annals of Christian evangelization of Nigeria. Developing more as an indigenous and classical Christian movement that propelled the policy of self-propagating and self-financing, the

group has numerous self-sacrificing individuals who pioneered Church planting and the preaching of the gospel in the interior areas of Nigeria. However, Pentecostal hermeneutics is highly vulnerable to manipulation and is riddled with personality cults. Rather than retreat from the world, Pentecostal hermeneutics have encouraged, to a greater or lesser degree, a doctrine of prosperity in which the spiritual and material fortunes of a believer are dependent on how much he gives materially to God, often through His representatives, who will reward him by prospering him.

Pentecostal hermeneutics is often theatrical and makes for great melodrama and showbiz. One of the end products of this showbiz by many Pentecostals is the emptying of the very essential content of the Christian message of the cross from their homilies and preaching, in preference for the commercialization of the gospel. Blaring loud speakers and microphones, loud dancing and clapping, advertised healing and miracles and commercialization are some features of modern Pentecostalism.

Nwadior and Umeanolue (2013) describe commercialization as a process or cycle of introducing a new product or production matter into the market. Now some Pentecostal pastors are commercializing the gospel in the name of preaching the word of God to people at market squares, buses and their Churches in their own commercial

interest. The commercializers of the gospel are not even shy to demonstrate their credentials through their own affluence and lavish lifestyle, to the pitiful admiration of many young and impressionable people.

What is obvious is that such preachers always make emphasis on money while preaching to people. They always make use of certain words to deceive people because they want money from them. They maintain that Jesus admonishes “truly you receive, freely you give” (Matthew 21:18) without even minding that what Jesus meant when He said that is to help human beings to resist the temptation to commercializing religion. But despite this injunction many of these preachers have not been able to resist the reality that they had made religion a source of merchandize.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Deprivation Theory**

The theme of deprivation in the sociology of religion is a major but extremely varied one. The starting point is possibly Karl Marx’s contribution. Marx established a link between religion and deprivation. Deprivation, for Marx, results from social class relations. The theory tend to offer blanket explanations for all religious activities irrespective of the religion, cultural background, and insist that all religion is explainable on a social and psychological level by felt inadequacies and need. This becomes most obvious perhaps in the simple assertion that classical Pentecostalism

primarily derives from the lower socio-economic strata with clear material needs (the poor, the urban migrant, and so on).

This theory in most cases, contributed to the formation of these new religious groups. For some people, it is a source of consolidation to the harsh condition of life which they are passing through.

Clock (1958) defines deprivation as any and all ways an individual or group may be, or disadvantaged in comparison either to other individuals or groups or to an internalized set of standard. Cox thus stretched the notion of deprivation to understand how Pentecostalism in various ways provides a channel in times of rapid social, cultural and economic change.

As far as Pentecostalism is concerned, sociologists and historians alike have seen the movement as originating and spreading in a particular time and space, and essentially a product of anomic conditions generated by industrialization, economic fluctuation and urbanization, and frequently associated with migrant groups. Thus, Pentecostalism tends to offer certainly in a world of uncertainty.

Pentecostalism is generally held to be the fastest growing expression of Christianity in Nigeria. Its prolific spread throughout the various strands of the movement is explicable in its link with economic deprivation. Cox (1995)

and Martin (1990) have tended to see Pentecostalism as representing a popularized form of Christianity which provides for the needs of the impoverished masses. Pentecostalism is understood to be noteworthy because of its theological flexibility which, in more practical terms, allows for a wide appeal of the movement in offering real and supposed solutions to both individual and collective predicaments and largely explains why this unique strand of Christianity can deal with a wide variety of deprivations. In this way the theological flexibility and associated practices of Pentecostalism appeal to numerous and very different social groups.

Many scholars view the phenomenon of Pentecostalism as one that is more widespread among the poor and the deprived of the society. In fact, Anderson (cited by Dim, 2012) calls it a third World Phenomenon. For him:

Pentecostalism is both fundamentally and dominantly a third world phenomenon. The Pentecostal emphasis on freedom in the spirit has rendered the movement inherently flexible in different cultural and social contexts. This made the transplanting of their central tenets in the majority world and among marginalized minorities in the western world more easily assimilated. (p. 68).

Given this underprivileged situation, Pentecostalism is often able to make

serious inroads and significant impact among many peoples of the world who then receive the gospel and healing message as a gospel for the poor. However, the emphases upon spiritual experience, prophecy and miracle have frequently rendered the theology open to misinterpretation and abuse.

### **Pentecostal Explosion in Nigeria: A Historical Survey**

One may need a foreign missionary to hear the gospel for the first time but not necessarily for experiencing the baptism of the spirit. Yet some scholars write about African Pentecostalism as if they were recounting the saga of nineteenth century missionaries. According to Kalu (2008). The Pentecostal experience in Nigeria broke out without missionaries or any foreigners and often to the consternation of missionaries who deployed the colonial government's clout to contain the flares.

Again, some scholars write the history of African Pentecostalism as if it is an extension of American electronic Church. For instance, Achunike (2004) believes that "Pentecostalism was not a known feature in Nigerian religious landscape before 1970, when the mainline Churches dominated the religious scene" (p. 14). For him, independent Churches must not be confused with Pentecostal Churches. He agrees with Omoyajowo (1982) that the Cherubim and Seraphim which was founded in 1925 blazed the trail of African Independent Churches.

Achunike (2009) further states that "Pentecostal movement as a twentieth century development is traced to a revival, which began in 1 January, 1901 at Charles Perham's Bethel Bible school in Topeka, Kansas, USA" (P.9). However, it is the opinion of the present researcher that African Pentecostalism did not originate from Perham's Bethel Bible school in Topeka and is not an extension of American electronic Church. The movement emanated from the missionary Churches and evangelical spirituality. It is a paradigm shift amid the new developments in African Christianity. It is one of the ways that Africans responded to the missionary structures and appropriated their message.

Kalu (2008) opines that the first Pentecostal element in African response to Christian missionaries was the Ethiopian Movement. Ethiopianism was a muscular movement that operated with a certain theology claiming that God has not deserted Africans to their humiliation but has raised people to restore Africa's lost glory. The Ethiopian movement believed that Africa could be redeemed through Christianity. The battle at that time was the recovery of African identity through religious powers. The movement carried within it the seed of the early African American evangelization of Africa who arrived in West Africa in 1792 with a charismatic spirituality, a spirit of anti-structure, resistance to colonial Christianity, and vibrant Black Nationalism. This stamped

African Christianity with recurring themes that would engage and energize African Pentecostalism in the twentieth and twenty first centuries.

Ethiopian responses to colonialism gave voice to African discontent and exodus movement from missionary institutions to found “native” African Churches. These informed the respond of the future, as Kalu (2008) would say that “the battle cry will echo through the centuries from theirs to ours that Africans must evangelize Africa, the sphinx must solve its own riddle” (p. ix). This message resounds like an echo throughout hollowed conch of African Church history traceable in the messages of notable African Pentecostals and intercessors for Africa who have documented prophetic messages about God’s design for Africa. This message inspired Pentecostal cultural policy that recognizes the powers in African world and crafted a theology of salvation that wove the Christ figure into African universe who could rescue them from demons and inimical forces. Pentecostalism in Africa disagree with the missionaries that the “gods” are nothing. Rather Pentecostals argue from an intense reliance on the Bible that Christ redeems from demonic forces.

From this perspective, the discourse on the American origin of African Pentecostalism is an obvious attempt to impose a foreign interpretation on African response to missionary Christianity.

However, the character of modern African Pentecostalism changes in every generation, indeed, in every decade. Inspired by the success of Ethiopian movements, charismatic wind blew through the African continent in the pre-World War period. Certain prophets emerged to till the soil on which modern Pentecostalism would thrive. These prophets were people groomed in the missionary churches, Protestants and Catholic, but they were closer to the grain of African culture in their responses to the gospel and so felt the resonance between the charismatic indigenous worldviews and the equally charismatic biblical worldview. Between 1910 and 1940, William Wade Harris of the Grebo tribe in Liberia, Garrick Braide of the Niger Delta, Jehu Appiah of Ghana, Simon Kinbangu of East Central Africa, and many others traversed the length and breadth of tropical Africa, baptizing, healing, and teaching new choruses and charismaticing the religious landscape.

Then the world wars came and scattered missionary infrastructure, giving rise to new vista of African religious initiative. But the wars brought new social and political forces as Europeans consolidated their hold on African lands and economic resources and exploited and abused the African labour force. African response included subversive rumours, nascent political mobilization, and a plethora of radical religious movements predominantly bearing the



marks of charismatic spirituality (Kalu, 2008). The seeds that indigenous prophets sowed sprouted in the inter war years into the roots of the modern Pentecostal movements.

The 1980s proved a heady period in African Pentecostalism because of the vast changes including vast socio-economic and political collapse, the enlarged networking with external western forms of Pentecostalism, and the liberalization of media space in Africa. The combination of religious and cultural changes, especially, increase contact with external change agents and the intense use of media as an instrument of evangelization prepared the ground for modern Pentecostal explosion in Nigeria.

Then there was the trans-denominational charismatic movements beginning in the interdenominational student groups of Nigerian Universities, and spreading through the creation of fellowships which grew into Churches often led by lecturers or teachers, into the broader, predominantly urban, literate population (Gifford, 1987). Strictly speaking, they are Pentecostals, but incorporated varying elements of doctrine and practice which are associated by scholars with the American and British “fundamentalists”, “evangelicals” and “neo evangelicals”, as well as with successive waves of America Pentecostalism, which in the Nigerian context are identified most often with prosperity doctrine Churches.

This association of some kind with foreign missionaries or US based Churches is seen by some scholars as having American origin. Marshal (1993) has associated this with the rise all over Africa of the “Faith Movement” as an outgrowth of American evangelism on the continent. Indeed, many of the pastors of the Pentecostal Churches in modern times received their religious training at one of the Bible colleges run by prosperity preachers in the USA. Those unable to travel often enroll in the correspondence courses offered by such colleges. Although the prestige attached to enrolment in one of these courses is very high, and the potential for gospel commercialization in the future greatly enhanced, most aspirants have to content themselves with attending one of the rapidly proliferating groups of Nigerian Bible schools.

The tendency for new pastors to seek their religious instructions in the United States, their efforts to create international networks (for financial reasons obviously, but also to bolster their legitimacy, and travel abroad as often as possible) makes their ministries vulnerable to commercialization. Ojawale (1990) echoes one believer’s testimony that the more the pastors travel abroad, the more they dress fine - gold chain, gold wristwatch - so the congregation sees that our God is a good God.

Hence, Nwadiolor and Umeanolue (2013) decry that “commercialization of the gospel entered into Nigeria through the several visiting American materialistic gospel preachers and through their books, magazines, pamphlets and radio programmes” (p. 34). Indeed, Church has become a significant economic operator in the country.

### **Enabling Background for Commercialization of the Gospel Message in Nigeria**

The root of gospel commercialization in Nigeria can be seen in what Kalu (2008) describes as the market theory. He linked commercialization of the gospel to the market theory built around the rational choice concept that profiles the religious space as being similar to a market place, and examines the commercialization of religion as a commodity, because messages are packaged as products in a competitive market place. He argues that marketing strategies enable religious businessmen to dupe gullible consumers by selling their books, videos, and audiotapes, and all manners of waves, using the sales techniques honed in the secular marketplaces. He adds that the glitz mixes religion with entertainment. The preacher and television star become inseparable as the big man of the big God.

However, commercialization of the gospel is influenced by certain, other phenomena such as politics, African

worldview, economy, and mass media and so on. The religious trend reflects the shift in popular culture in the social, political, and economic spheres. Both secular and religious entrepreneurs use the same communications strategies and interact closely.

### **Influence of Secular Politics**

Pentecostal representation borrowed heavily from political culture. For instance, it was the political class who initiated the advertising style using glossy, iconic, colour photographs of the candidates. Government leaders install huge bill boards from which they smile down at the public with the assurance that the country, state or city work best under their leadership, and photographs of completed public projects would adorn the bill boards as veritable proof.

Pentecostal leaders soon abandoned the old aesthetic samples and promoted their anointing as successful big men of a big God (Kalu, 2008). Ukeh (2003) adds that:

the aesthetics of the poster, therefore, reflects the underlying doctrines of the new religion with its thematic emphasis on an expensive God whose wealth is located in the market place of commercial practice; its design is partly governed by local practice of exhibiting one’s best as a way of seeking notice, of symbolically communicating one’s worth to a public who recognizes and desires wealth

and grandiose. Part of the proselytizing potentials of the poster thus is located in its design to appeal to an audience that understands the logic of its image, a public willing and desirous of sharing in the wealth of God displayed in the life of the pastor whose image proudly gazes out from the poster. The power of the gaze to focus, channel and organize attention is generally recognized therein. (p .221).

This shift in ecclesiology, the importance of titles, and the size of projects are connected with profile and visibility of a ministry. The high visibility iconic image tangoed with intense spirituality to draw public, national and international attentions. These are essential for getting the political ears of the government to listen to pastors who control a large constituency of voters.

Thus, beneath the need to disseminate information and evangelize lurk the intricate relationships between evangelization and commercialization and a significant modification of the image of the pastor/shepherded. Where Paul called himself a bondservants, the new pastor engages in a personality cult, and flaunts his person, wealth and status. The medium in this sense tends to reshape the messenger, trivialize the message, and distort the image carved by the simplicity of Jesus. The glossy

photographs of the leader, his wife or family, and members who celebrated happy events serve as mission statements asserting the believer's capacity to refuse defeat from the harsh, disabling environment and to pose as over comer.

### **Influence of Modernity**

Modernity is another factor that gives rise to commercialization of the gospel. Modernity in this sense means the natural extension of mankind's craving for total control of all that concerns him here and now. The ideology is dangerously influencing the process, programmes, products, beliefs, dressing and the understanding of this age. The Pentecostal group has radically recast and revised the public worship of the Church in our society and beyond to suit what they consider being the modern trend of thought. They have introduced the exuberant praise and the exercise of miraculous powers believed to be from the Holy Spirit.

Modernity is further explained to be an outcome of secular humanism which after all has reflected the contemporary thinking in particular. Obviously the unchecked desire for material advancement is dangerously influencing the religious practices of some Pentecostal believers. Because of modernity, some Pentecostal preachers have taken out from the scriptures some ideas and rename them as to suit their individual ambitions. Some people have appeared as the special men of God. All

these can be seen as the work of the flesh been renamed and accepted into the Church as new ideas or modern civilization or development at the expense of the biblical truth. Nwaogu (cited by Eghucha, 2003) says that “in the Church today, as in the secular world, human need and acceptance define the gospel message” (p. 83). Because of modernity, some Churches today build on emotions, reason, and philosophies at the expense of biblical truth. The modern day preaching and teaching are based on the trend of events in the world. They follow issues like sowing of seeds, breakthrough and miracles. They regard the orthodox preachers as out- dated because we are in the modern world. As a matter of fact, strange people with strange doctrines have invaded the Pentecostal camp.

### **Economic Hardship**

Christianity has created a long-lasting impact in the improvement of the socio-economic well being of the people in Nigeria. However, the rapid changes that have taken place in socio-economic sphere of Nigeria have dislocated groups and individuals, creating an atmosphere of uncertainty or anxiety. The past seems to be crumbling and the shape of the future has not yet become clear. The problem of unemployment in Nigeria today is one of the most banal facts that have led to the proliferation of Pentecostal groups. Many unemployed youths have resorted to opening of Churches in every nook and cranny of the country in order to make ends meet.

The net result of all these is inevitable commercialization of the gospel. The business is becoming lucrative in Nigeria as far as people’s perceived problems seem to find solution. This has led to the proliferation of different miracle centres. It is for this reason that Lindsey (cited by Kalu, 2008) states, “as man’s search for new experiences, new leaders, new hopes, increase in intensity, there will be that continued desire to find an alternative route into what appears to be a dark future” (p. 831). Egbucha (2005) maintains that “people cling uncertainly to the discredited beliefs of their parents’ denominations or else grass frantically at any new proposal that offers a solution to the perennial problems of life” (p.110).

Some new generation pastors see these developments as opportunities for commercializing the gospel message in Nigeria. 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. Egbucha (2005) maintains that “the public display of the wealth of these pioneer miracle workers provoke more youths to enter into the business since what Nigerians are seeking for is miracle, no matter the source, nobody borders to know” (p.114). Consequently, miracle workers are emerging in their numbers to maximize profit in this age of uncertainty which for them is a flourishing time for religions that promise security. Many of these miracle preachers parade themselves as having

the same power of Jesus that in their worship centres, their members almost worship them along with God. Consequently, miracle is corrupted just as there is economic and political corruption.

In some of these miracle centres, people pay heavily to be prayed for and for a miracle to occur in their lives. In some centres, poor people are not allowed to see the miracle worker because they could not pay the consultation fees. In some occasions where a person fails, such a person is often blamed for not sowing the prerequisite seed of miracle with money or wealth. Consequently people ignorantly donate their cars, landed property, money and even their houses to miracle workers before they are being prayed for.

Closely related to this reason is the insatiable desire to be rich among Nigerians. According to Egbucha (2005). The ever quickening rat-race, the political double talk, the economic hardship, the deteriorating health condition, the high rate of unemployment and the desire to get rich quick, have created conditions favourable for the marketing of Christianity to the Nigerian public. For this, agents of commercialization of the gospel pretend to cater for the lust to be prosperous. Public display of real and supposed miracle attract other clients to such miracle centres especially when aired on the radio stations or projected on television stations.

### **Influence of African Cosmology**

Part of the reason why Pentecostal hermeneutics seems to be thriving in Nigeria is that the cosmology of many societies in Nigeria is filled with fearsome and unpredictable occurrences demanding Christian answers. Nwosu (2002) states that:

In Nigerian traditional cosmological ideas, the universe is populated by spirits living in the same geographical location with man; people must struggle against the evil spirits and their agents in the society. These evil spirits and their human agents are identified as the major cause of poverty, sickness, disease and death. As a matter of fact, survival in his environment depends upon how successful he is in this fight against evil forces and in the utilization of the services of good spirit. (p. 2).

Oguejiofor (2001) explains that the African world-view, which is decidedly anthropocentric but which also recognizes, respects and worships many divinities, lay emphasis on the relevance of these divinities especially on their effect on man himself. Worship becomes, therefore, focused on either engendering a better natural condition or placating one divinity or another so as to remove its destructive influence on man. It is this world view which has naturally helped shape the life and culture of this traditional African. But it is also this

traditional African who has today become a Christian, together with his sons and daughters all of them being now faced with the “attraction” of Pentecostalism.

Pentecostalism tends to relate the gospel directly to their troubles and the process of understanding the gospel essentially begins in the context of felt needs. In this way the gospel seeks to be relevant to the life’s totality and offers biblical deliverance from the real fear of evil, misfortune and affliction, which are compelling and universal human needs. This understanding of the gospel has to do with salvation from the experience of all evil forces ranged against peoples’ existence. This ideology is well utilized by the agents of commercialization of the gospel in Nigeria.

Closely related to the above reason is the fact that several conditions of the physical and psychological health of Nigerians is another essential cause of gospel commercialization. Before the advent of Christianity to Nigeria, the traditional medicine men offer solutions to some life’s problems and set out ways to cope with threatening and hostile world. Ransome-Kurt (cited by Egbucha, 2005), once observed that “scientific medicine as far as it relates to the population of Nigeria has failed” (p. 19). Ayodele (cited in Egbucha, 2005), further stressed that “orthodox medicine is very unsatisfactory in that it reaches only about 25% of the population” (p. 114). The Pentecostal group claim to

have answers to all these problems. In the absence of adequate modern health facilities, divine healing becomes the alternative. Miracle centres have become the big-time hospitals where diseases and sickness will disappear with the application of the power of God by the man of God.

### **Influence of Mass Media**

Commercialization of the gospel in Nigeria might be incomprehensible apart from the influence of mass media. In the last few decades or so, the novelty of increased media presence in Nigeria has not worn off. In recent times, there has been the proliferation of media of mass communication ranging from newspapers and magazines, to radios, television, and so on. The 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have introduced other electronic media such as computers, telephones and internet. Electronic media technology elicited much enthusiasm as a new instrument for forging transnational relationship, greater mass reach, direct encounter, Potential promotional attraction, and world evangelism. It is a medium that could reinforce the message and vision of the Church. According to Kalu (2008), the media could be an acculturating pathway for touching youthful audience who are already enmeshed, wired in the electronic culture and bored with the equally packaged institutional religion. However, the improvement in mass-media industries has sustained the presentation of

religious goods to the public. In this way religion is intrinsically woven into various forms of media representation and certain ethics of electronic media—such as commercialization and marketing of spiritual services are injected into the mission and vision of Pentecostalism. This new way of communicating has had enormous impact on the Christian doctrine, polity, liturgy and ethics, especially in the Pentecostal movement.

Advertisement, print and electronic media play prominent role in the commercialization of the gospel message in Nigeria because the market is largely unregulated particularly because the constitution of the country enshrined freedom of religion as a price for decolonization. The constitution did not actually separate religion from the state's concern such that media resources in Nigeria have become sites of the politics of religious difference and conflicts.

In all the electronic and print media in Nigeria, Church programmes constitute at least 60% of advertised programmes especially in southern and north central Nigeria (Egbucha, 2005). This is the medium through which agents of commercialization market their religion. They parade themselves everyday in different televisions dishing out divine healings to their gullible sick audience, and prophesying prosperity to their unsuspecting clients who would sow the seed of sponsoring their television and

radio programmes. Egbucha (2005) adds that:

Many musicians who have been at the brink of collapse in their music industries are now popular miracle singers. Not only producing Christian music, some of these miracle singers are now miracle workers, having their own denominations where people flock day and night looking for miracles; these miracle workers become rich over-nights, leaving in expensive mansions and having flashy cars. (p. 112).

Carrette and King (cited by Kalu, 2008) concludes that the secular cooperate interests have taken over spirituality to subvert individuals and seduce them into consumerism. Packaging the message does a number of things; it could distort the gospel, promote the creature instead of the creator and encrust a certain interiorized theology. Media exposure has changed attitudes to created order and given the leadership and their organization high public profile, sometimes to their own detriment.

### **Effects of Commercialization of the Gospel in Nigeria**

The harm that these agents of commercialization of the gospel do to the very Christian message which they claim to be propagating and even to their hearers can best be imagined. By going public they tend to recast Christianity as distraction, both in the sense of deliberately adopting an entertainment

format and dispersing the message without bounds. In doing so the message is dismembered into mediated religious forms and elements displayed everywhere in public market places. In this new public sphere religion intertwines with both national politics and commerce and entertainment.

According to Kalu (2008), another contentious matter is the impact of electronic culture on the personality of the pastor-clothes, demeanor, popularity, and consumption. For him:

The mass media bestows prestige and enhances authority of individuals and groups by legitimizing their status. Recognition by the press or radio or magazines or news reels testifies that one has arrived, that one is important enough to have been singled out from the larger anonymous masses, that one's behaviour and opinions are significant enough to required public notice. (p. 108).

Many Nigerians have been duped as a result of commercialization of the gospel. Many people looking for miracles pay anything they can afford in other to grab them. Some miracle workers are known to have seduced many women looking for fruits of the womb into illicit sexual relationships. Different marriages are shattered in consequence of this act.

In contemporary times, there is proliferation of fake miracle workers, who use non biblical means in their own miracle methods. Since what people are looking for is miracle, to cash on the boom, people with diabolic powers sneak into the business and have opened different miracle centres.

### **Concluding Recommendations**

In contemporary Christianity, Pentecostalism has become a major force constituting about a quarter of Nigeria's Christian population, and the number of Pentecostals has grown by stressing an intimate and joyous relationship with God, adapting to local cultures, especially as a people that have strong belief in the spirit worlds and by focusing in healing, prophecy and God's direct intervention in the material wellbeing of His People. Yet its multiplicity and amoebic character may have created a complex movement that is full of ironies. Commercialization and miracle Christianity become woven into a theology that profiles the mainline Churches as bench warmers who have lost the power of the gospel that was very real in the early Jesus movement.

It is, therefore, imperative that the government should regulate, not only the rate at which Churches acquire their own cable networks and commercialize their programmes, but should also regulate the registration of new religious movements. Freedom of religion should not be allowed to be abused by certain



individuals whose aim is only to make money and not to take people to Christ.

War against corruption should be carried to inside Churches to restore the image of the Church as the conscience of the society. This is necessary because the establishment of new Christianity and consequent commercialization of the gospel have not solved the problems of insecurity, uncertainty, sickness and poverty in Nigeria.

The level of intense use of mass media for evangelism should be re-examined. There is the need to examine cultural production at the point of consumption. For instance, do colourful handbills, posters, and billboards sporting photos of iconic rich pastors and scriptural promises convert, allure, or persuade the unbelievers? They may attract attention and create a religious culture that offers solutions to everyday life challenges, hopes, and fears; and they may invite and allure, but it is another thing to get the fish to bite. They could construct how reality should be imagined and create an atmosphere suggesting that religion is important for the nation, yet their ulterior motive is fraudulent.

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