

INTELLECTUAL DEBATES WITHIN NIGERIAN NEO-PENTECOSTALISM IN THE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURIES

FILIBUS YAWEH

Federal University Wukari, Nigeria

ATTAH JONATHAN

Federal University of Education, Zaria, Nigeria

VALENTINE A. CECELIA

Federal University Wukari, Nigeria

KPENDWA YARO DAUDU

Federal University Wukari, Nigeria

AGUNWA VINCENT ONYEDIKACHI

St. Anne's School, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

This paper underscores the implications of the rapid proliferation of Nigerian neo-Pentecostalism within the Religious Market Theory by suggesting that the commodification of spiritual products, namely, Prosperity Theology and Spiritual Warfare, as an answer to the existential concerns of people facing economic precarity, is a rational reaction to the competition in the marketplace. The study contends that the dynamism of the movement in the 21st century can only be interpreted as an act of strategic entrepreneurship, not just as a religious revival, but as the consequence of engaging in a deregulated spiritual economy. In a historical examination of intellectual discussions, political mobilisation, and gender rhetoric, the results indicate that this entrepreneurialism has helped the church become a kind of shadow state, offering welfare and political legitimacy where the government had failed. Nevertheless, this market hegemony has produced major internal contradictions, and this has raised urgent calls for commercialisation to be checked through ethical reforms by organisations like the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria. The paper concludes that the future of the movement lies in a corrective action that is necessary in the marketplace to reconcile the aggressive growth of the religious firm with institutional integrity.

KEYWORDS: Nigerian Neo-pentecostalism, Prosperity Theology, Religious Market Theory, Political Activism, and Gender Discourse.

INTRODUCTION

Pentecostalism has become one of the most vibrant and evolving forces in Nigeria's socio-political context that has essentially remodelled the spiritual and social life of the country in the 21st century. Since the rapid proliferation of the movement since the campus revivals of the 1970s, whose broader formation can be traced to the Azusa Street revival of 1906 up to the formation of massive megachurches that serve as quasi-state institutions, the movement has gone beyond the confines of individual faith to become the main source of social mobility, political discussion, and cultural identification (Omogbai, 2025). These ministries have managed to establish a new definition of the relationship between the sacred/secular in the Global South by establishing themselves as alternative sources of welfare, education, and governance in an institutionally failed country characterised by economic precarity, especially in the 21st century.

This paper focuses on the path of the Nigerian neo-pentecostalism with the framework of the Religious Market Theory by stating that the religious world is a deregulated economy where churches are the firms and the leaders represent rational entrepreneurs. The results suggest that the accelerated growth of the movement and internal contradictions are not the consequences of the chaos but are the natural results of the intense competition in the market. The paper indicates that the Nigerian neo-pentecostalism has successfully commoditised the sacred, thus guaranteeing a heterogeneous consumer base.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper uses Religious Market Theory, which is also referred to as the Religious Economy Model, to explain the growth and organisational workings of Nigerian Neo-pentecostalism. According to the views of such scholars as Finke and Stark (1992) and Iannaccone (1998), the religious landscape operates somewhat like a commercial economy, with religious pluralism creating a kind of marketplace where religious organisations compete to win followers, and where leaders act as entrepreneurs. According to the theory, the natural result of a deregulated religious market, where the state imposes no religious monopoly, is innovation, as groups are forced to innovate to meet the needs of the local population. The theory is directly relevant to the Nigerian case, where the erosion of mission-focused Christianity and the ineptitude of the state institutions have left a vacuum that was occupied by a proliferation of independent ministries.

The theory explains that Pentecostal ministries are competitive religious businesses that produce differentiated spiritual commodities, such as prosperity theology, spiritual warfare, and charismatic worship, to attract and maintain followers in a pluralistic religious environment. Also, it guides the analysis of Pentecostal leaders as religious entrepreneurs who use innovation, media technologies, welfare programmes, and political activism to expand their influence and institutional relevance. In addition, the theory enables the interpretation of internal theological

arguments, ethical scandals, and reformations as a contest in the context of the deregulated religious market, whereby warring ministries struggle over legitimacy, authority, and market share.

HISTORY AND CHARACTERISTICS OF NIGERIAN NEO-PENTECOSTALISM

The history of Pentecostalism in Nigeria involves several phases reflecting both indigenous initiatives and foreign influence. Globally, the modern Pentecostal movement is commonly traced to the Azusa Street Revival of 1906 in Los Angeles, which laid the foundation for the spread of Pentecostal spirituality across different parts of the world. The movement began in the early twentieth century when an Anglican-inspired prophetic movement developed after the 1918 influenza epidemic, later becoming the Christ Army Church. Other organizations like the Eternal Sacred Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim and the Church of the Lord Aladura were founded in 1925 and 1930. These churches emphasized prayer, healing, and deliverance as alternatives to traditional religious practices. This Aladura or African Initiated Church movement developed between the 1910s and 1930s under leaders such as Joseph Ayo Babalola, who founded the Christ Apostolic Church in 1941 (Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, Lagos State, 2025). A second phase emerged in the 1950s through the Latter Rain revival led by British and American evangelists, including Sydney Granville Elton and Oral Roberts, focusing on healing and apocalyptic expectations. The third phase was the Neo-pentecostal movement from the 1960s to the 1980s, shaped by American evangelical literature and campus revivals (Richman, 2020). Leaders like Benson Idahosa and Enoch Adeboye expanded the movement into a global force. Since the 1990s, demonology and spiritual warfare have become prominent features of the movement.

Nigerian Neo-Pentecostalism stands out with certain features that it employs as a competitive edge in the religious market. One of the main products is Prosperity Theology because it identifies material success with faith (Clement, 2025). When we think in terms of supply and demand, this doctrine helps fulfil the existential needs of a population that faces a struggle with poverty. It is a skilled marketer of hope and motivation as a vital commodity of the people of the spirit. Charismatic Worship also operates as an independent brand style which focuses on rich experiences and prayer power (Ogunewu, 2022). The movement also focuses on practical displays of power, speaking in tongues, and healing miracles, to satisfy the consumer's need to have an immediate supernatural response. These traditions show tactical market orientation as the church incorporates the native aspects, like prophecy.

Community involvement is also a strategic provision of club goods, and churches have been active in providing schools, clinics, and charitable programmes. This feature increases the cost-benefit ratio of belonging as it provides for the welfare needs of consumers in the short term when the state fails to support them. These social programmes enhance the competitive situation and institutional legitimacy of the church in the general society. The movement also focuses on youth involvement as a

way of ensuring a crucial future market share (Clement, 2025). Enterprises using religion as a marketing tool utilise innovations in their products, including modern technology, social media, and modern music, to suit the changing preferences of the younger generation and address their socioeconomic needs. This functional malleability depicts a logical adaptation to competitive forces and enables the church to be relevant to its changing religious economy. The 21st century is one of the periods that has seen an unprecedented boom of Pentecostalism in Nigeria, thus establishing it as a formidable force in the religious market.

THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS AND INTELLECTUAL CONTROVERSIES

Nigerian Neo-pentecostalism is dynamic with debates that show internal tensions and reactions to societal challenges emerging out of competition in a plural and deregulated religious market where the differentiation of the religious firms is a differentiating strategy. Prosperity theology is a large component of Nigerian Neo-Pentecostalism, and an area of much discussion since it is a highly competitive spiritual product, and is offered to draw followers in a highly saturated religious market. It is popularly understood and acknowledged, especially among the youth population, to be a godly weapon against unemployment, poverty, failure, illness, and insecurity as it is an immediate and concrete response to consumer demand of socio-economic precarity in the religious marketplace (Alala & Eko, 2022). It became stronger as a reaction to socio-economic shifts and the adverse effects of structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s and the following years, which stressed material prosperity and financial breakthrough as divine answers to poverty, hence demonstrating how religious entrepreneurs realign theological services to demand fluctuations following economic crises.

Nonetheless, this focus is met with a lot of criticism because other actors in the same market will challenge the validity and the viability of this theological commodity. Critics like Ubuane (2020) argue that prosperity theology is a materialistic movement in Christianity and hence does not reflect the early teachings of Jesus Christ. This market-theoretic criticism can be understood as an effort to inoculate doctrinal quality control, which safeguards long-term consumer trust.

Spiritual warfare is a well-developed theological focus in Nigerian Neo-pentecostalism that affects perceptions of reality and responses to adversity. In the past, it could be perceived as a scholarly reaction driven by competition in Nigeria's plural religious setting. Life is often presented as a battlefield of good and evil, light and darkness, God and Satan, which is a story that has been successful in bringing meaning to the ambiguity and suffering in the shifting social order (Ekechi, 2025). This worldview explains misfortunes as deliberate actions of evil powers, e.g., witches and witchcraft, as opposed to accidentalness, which supports the usefulness of Pentecostal ministries as intermediaries between the spiritual and material worlds that need them. Pentecostal theology is based on biblical teachings like Ephesians 6:12, which also highlights the use of warfare prayers to overcome spiritual forces as well as deliver people under their control; historically used by the Pentecostal churches in

contrast to the older mission churches, which downplayed the role of spiritual causality (Ephesians 6:12, New International Version).

The intersection zone between religion, development, social justice, and ethics has generated conflicting opinions in Nigerian Neo-pentecostalism. Economic incentive and commercialisation of faith have been cited in many of the larger mega churches, but some have been identified as the Progressive Pentecostals through their long-term dedication to the diaconal ministries and community growth (Adedibu, 2023). Such churches are involved in missionary work like developing entrepreneurial talents, clinics and schools, and a welfare package, which benefits both members and non-members. Ethical issues that have become topical are accountability and anti-corruption. Programmes like the Priests' Peace and Justice Initiative (PPJ) are also in the heat to market faith-based patterns of accountability in and outside the church to counter corruption (MacArthur Foundation, 2025). These moves include the formulation of manuals, educating leaders and workers on the biblical and ethical behaviour change tools, and the creation of forums against corruption. It is focused on the nurturing of accountability and trust, and the realisation that daily life has language and systems as given by faith. Marketwise, the campaign of the PPJ can be seen as a push to industry self-regulation, a tactic of the old stakeholders to curb the marketplace of the unscrupulous trading of unregulated religious entrepreneurs and ensure that the overall brand image of Pentecostalism is not stained by the underbelly activities of unscrupulous religious traders.

NEO-PENTECOSTALISM AND POLITICAL DISCOURSE

In 21st century Nigeria, Neo-pentecostalism has had an enormous power in the political sphere of the country, controlling both dialogue and political governance. The movement has been gaining more involvement in politics to the extent of becoming a key player in the process of making political decisions in the country. Such engagement is achieved in several ways, namely, pulpit endorsements and political candidacy. It goes without saying that politicians of all religions are seeking the support of the influential evangelical votes during their campaigns (Batard, 2020). Pentecostals and other evangelicals have since 1993 undertaken concerted efforts to present candidates in all political offices at all levels. High-profile Pentecostal preachers actively seek approval, and in fact, some of the preachers, like the then Vice President, Oluyemi Osinbajo, a senior pastor at the RCCG, have become politicians (Ikem, Nwachinemere, and Ogunnubi, 2020). Interestingly, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), which is mainly dominated by the Pentecostal leadership, has made official statements urging the members to vote for candidates who can support Christian interests. In the state-wide elections in Lagos and Rivers, local Pentecostal pastors encouraged congregations to participate, by presenting it as a civic but spiritual obligation, thus accounting for a significant voter turnout.

Pentecostal churches also help in the development of the country through welfare programmes and physical social infrastructure that could complement or substitute government efforts, which is a historical development based on state retreat

and a sociological expression of religious institutions expanding into service provision in a competitive religious space, which values observable social relevance. Many churches have built homes, schools, hospitals, boreholes, and roads, especially in the poor rural and peri-urban places, and thus bridging structural voids created by poor governance, creating daily dependence which is transformed into moral authority and loyalty to a group. An example of this is the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), which has built model schools, community health centres, and educational institutions, including the Redeemer University, where long-term investment in social infrastructure has traditionally improved institutional stability and produced disciplined and politically responsive congregational networks. The Covenant University and Landmark University of Winners Chapel are now established institutions (Oderinde, Owoade, Abioye, and Afolabi, 2023), which support the long-term visibility of the churches and their ability to influence the socialisation of elites.

Humanitarian interventions are also important. Different Pentecostal ministries provided thousands of homes with cash, food, and personal protective equipment in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. The InnerCity Mission for Children of Christ Embassy offers food programmes, educational sponsorships, and orphanage support programmes in several states in Nigeria (Adebayo, 2020). Pentecostal churches have provided relief items, temporary shelters, and psychosocial counselling in post-disaster regions of Nigeria, including internally displaced persons camps in Borno and flood-affected regions in Bayelsa. Such practical involvement not only fills the gaps that have been created by underperforming state institutions, but it also makes churches quasi-state actors, in the sense that churches can mobilise resources quickly and directly apply them to the needy communities. Such interventions are visible to strengthen the moral authority of the Pentecostal leadership and the social legitimacy of the churches with the extension of their influence to the political sphere.

Following the above discussion, most Pentecostal megachurches have taken advantage of their pulpits to advance social justice, accountability, and ethical leadership and have often spoken on the issue of corruption as a moral and spiritual crisis that has caused a derailment in the growth of Nigeria. In other cases, the sermons present corruption as not only a violation of law but a sin against God and a curse to the national fate, to address the religious beliefs of the congregation as well as their sense of civic responsibility. An example is the Priests Peace and Justice Initiative (PPJ), an organisation of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), which provides campaigns all over the country offering pastors, church workers, and youth leaders practical instruments to detect, oppose, and report corrupt practices both in the church and the wider community (MacArthur Foundation, 2025). Through structured workshops that have been consistently organised, the Priests' Peace and Justice Initiative has trained thousands of Christians in ethical governance, community mobilisation, and advocacy, while commissioning "Anti-Corruption Ambassadors" tasked with promoting transparency in local communities.

Moreover, Neo-pentecostalism has had ubiquitous effects on the Nigerian electoral politics and governance, thereby creating a discourse in the society that is full of Pentecostal ideologies. Anouk Batard (2020) refers to the definition of Nigeria as a

Pentecostal republic, which was formulated by Ebenezer Obadare, who bases this label on the visible involvement of pastors and Christian organisations in politics at their level. The movement has provided a new vocabulary of national identity, which reorganises the policy debate on the binary of good and evil and the concept of Christian nation, attracting followers and dividing them at the same time. This has been referred to as white-collar fundamentalism, which came to life in the oil boom era, offering ontological schemas to justify wealth-making, and at the same time, accuses the political elites of being in collusion with the witchcraft in corruption scandals (Batard, 2020). At the same time, the doctrine of being holy, which tends to give more importance to asceticism, has clashed with calls to exhibit more moral behaviour in the social world.

The “pentecostalisation” of governance has increased both the struggle over the outlines of the governmental public and further politicised religion despite the maintenance of nominal adherence to secularism. The most conspicuous demonstration of this dynamic is the transformation of a simple claim of secularism of states into an actual affirmation of its Christianisation (Obadare, 2006). The shift is also manifested in a quantifiable but significant change regarding the involvement of Christians in political offices.

There is a discernible nexus of Pentecostal theology and Nigerian politics, both of which are characterised by a mutual politicisation of the spiritual world and the spiritualisation of the political world. The widespread usage of the spiritual-warfare rhetoric to describe political problems is a relevant intersection of religious ideology and political action, and thus it distorts the traditional boundaries between the sacred and the secular (Ekechi, 2025). The erosion of this boundary has far-reaching consequences on national discussion and conflict resolution because the disagreements in policies are restructured as spiritual conflicts, making the process of conflict resolution more burdensome. Clerical leaders like Enoch Adeboye have suggested that spiritual solutions are required to address the national malaise; such claims support the convergence and increase the religious tensions by transforming political disputes into spiritual ones (Oderinde, Owoade, Abioye, and Afolabi, 2023).

RESISTANCE TO GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND SOCIETAL PRESSURES

Institutional competition by the Nigerian Pentecostal leaders has seen them exhibit immeasurable resistance to government policies and societal pressure. This political activism that serves as a pulpit is a strategic struggle for power over social practises, by religious actors who would like to contest state power monopoly. Anti-democratic practises have frequently been challenged by leaders such as Tunde Bakare to make the church a better alternative in terms of morality than the state. He was also an outspoken critic of different presidents and endorsed youth movements, such as the #EndSARS, as this helps the church brand to resonate with the needs of the disgruntled citizens. David Oyedepo has strongly spoken out against bad leadership in politics and ethnic cleansing to secure his religious consumer base against external attacks. He accused the government of not taking any action against killer-herders and

demanding the resignation of President Buhari to affirm the validity of spiritual government over ineffective secular government. The Independent National Electoral Commission was publicly declared by the likes of Paul Adefarasin as a fraud to contest the structural barriers that restrict the possibility of fair contests in politics. Even more diplomatic Enoch Adeboye has made subtle digs at the government through the mobilisation of his huge market share. He conducted a prayer procession against insecurity and counselled on how the country should be restructured to show the soft power impact of the religious firm (Orogun & Pillay, 2023).

The state tends to respond to such confrontational ways with resistance to defend its monopoly on power. The government leaders rejected the idea of restructuring by Adeboye as unpatriotic to restrain the political market share of the church. The fact that Oyedepo defied the Company and Allied Matters Act (CAMA) was also viewed as bullying and could not reverse the policy since the state was not ready to surrender its regulatory powers to a religious company. Efforts made to suppress the voices of activists by arrests or other forms of detention also explain why religious actors find it very expensive to access the political arena. The institutional impact of this activism is contested on whether it will work in the long term. Other researchers contend that the reactive and emotive form of it is simply a thing that is being foisted with a few pieces of text and does not have the enduring product quality of a social gospel or a theology of the people (Orogun & Pillay, 2023). This volatility contrasts with more rational and persuasive strategies focusing on consensus and multireligious inclusiveness to ensure social impact becomes as high as possible.

GENDER DISCOURSE AND PENTECOSTALISM

Nigerian Neo-pentecostalism poses a few contradictory, simultaneous impacts on the 21st century gender discourse, especially in the roles of women, marriage, family, and sexuality. Indeed, Nigerian Pentecostalism has worked to overcome traditional gender disadvantages, giving credit to equal and, in most cases, just partnership of both men and women (Odey & Ajima, 2020). This movement, which has been termed a religion of positive gospel and creative religion, has seen more opportunities for women taking up leadership positions such as pastors, prophets, founders of churches, and counsellors. An example of this is the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), which enables women to be ordained, which is a major change (Adeleke, Okunoye, and Popoola, 2025). These developments are in numerous places defended by biblical interpretations which underline the important contribution of women in Christianity, giving an example of prophetesses, female leaders in the Bible, and the concept of egalitarianism of spiritual gifts, which can be given irrespective of gender. Specifically, Neo-Pentecostal movements seem to be taking the lead by, instance, giving women eminent position of equal standing with men in their religious hierarchy, which is regarded as a way of providing gender-balanced education in Nigeria (Odey, Boypa, Felix, Ekpenyong, Bassey, Asuquo, Ella, and Edet, 2025).

These positive moves notwithstanding, there are contradictions in the movement. Even though there are churches where women are glorified with leadership positions, another church can be practising the same doctrines that suppress women in making decisions or preaching. This is indicative of a broader internal struggle as the movement balances between contemporary gender views and still clings to the traditional theological views (Clement, 2025). The conservative theological interpretations go together with the selective promotion of women's roles in Pentecostalism, typically developed in the framework of spiritual gifting, and not the universal rights. This creates a partial and even contradictory agency of women in which they can become leading figures in the church, though equality of the genders in all respects may not be actively promoted or achieved. This internal conflict is one of the most important intellectual debates in the movement itself, and it influences the overall relevance of the movement on the gender discourse.

It can also be argued that Neo-pentecostal attitudes towards marriage, family, and divorce can be discussed. The teachings of Pentecostalism highly relate to fidelity and the creation of thriving monogamous marriages, which they propose as a perfect example to follow by Born-Again Christian believers. Logically, in divorce matters, the doctrine of the Pentecostal church does not approve it, and this is in line with the biblical teachings. But, the number of divorces is growing even in the Pentecostal churches, and the divorced persons tend to feel discriminated and inadequately supported, which results in spiritual difficulties.

Neo-pentecostal churches and their leaders have a strong influence on shaping the discourse on LGBTQ+ rights in Nigeria. The language of their speech is highly condemnatory of LGBTQ + identities and relationships, depicting them as an assault on traditional values, natural order, and the will of God. Such perceptions are typically portrayed as being weakened by the contemporary Western forces (Osisanwo and Alugin, 2024). Enoch Adeboye is among the prominent Pentecostal leaders who led and lobbied for anti-gay acts, and the result was the implementation of the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act of 2014. This bill criminalised same sex marriages and was overwhelmingly supported by Protestant and, more so, the Pentecostal Christians. Such acts of legislation not only created laws to put in place but also enhanced a social attitude toward sexual and gender minorities, thereby furthering stigmatisation and prejudice in the Nigerian society (Osisanwo & Alugin, 2024).

INTERNAL REFORMS, CHALLENGES, AND DEBATES WITHIN PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENTS

The rapid growth and increasing influence of Nigerian Pentecostalism have brought forth momentous internal dynamics, including calls for reform, persistent challenges, and ongoing debates regarding governance, leadership, and adaptation to modernity. The immense growth and wealth accumulated by Pentecostal churches have led to criticisms concerning their economic motivations, potential exploitation, and the commercialisation of faith (Ojighoro, 2024). Issues such as mismanagement of church funds, disagreements over financial contributions, and alleged financial exploitation by leaders are frequently raised, prompting demands for greater transparency and accountability (Agochukwu & Ogele, 2025). To give credence to the analysis above, it is

important to state that financial controversies have also surfaced within church communities. Pastor Biodun Fatoyinbo of the Commonwealth of Zion Assembly (COZA) has faced not only allegations of sexual misconduct but also accusations of flamboyance and opaque financial practices. In Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), long-standing disputes over leadership control and resource management contributed to splintering and factionalism, underscoring the challenges of transparency in Pentecostal governance.

In response, various reform efforts and initiatives have emerged. The Priests' Peace and Justice Initiative (PPJ), for example, actively promotes accountability within Pentecostal churches. It develops manuals and conducts training for leaders and members on biblical, ethical, and practical tools to combat corruption, including establishing "social arms" within churches to address social justice issues. The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) under Enoch Adeboye has implemented reforms, such as allowing the ordination of women, despite initial resistance from some elders, demonstrating an adaptive capacity for growth. The Living Faith Church Worldwide has also introduced internal restrictions on pastors attending external programmes, a measure that suggests a focus on maintaining doctrinal consistency and centralising authority (Oyedepo, 2025). Historically, early Pentecostal bodies like The Apostolic Church Nigeria (TACN) emphasised servant leadership and a collaborative approach to governance, which contributed to their early stability (Adeleye & Aluko, 2025).

A substantial tension exists between the charismatic authority commonly held by Pentecostal leaders and the growing demands for institutional accountability. The charismatic institution is characterised by a highly centralised leadership model prevalent in many Pentecostal megachurches, where leaders can accrue immense personal power and wealth. This situation is increasingly scrutinised by societal and internal calls for greater transparency and financial probity. The "politics of belonging" further complicates this dynamic, as leaders strive to maintain influence and control within their expanding organisations (Adesoji, 2016). Reforms, when implemented, often face internal resistance, indicating an ongoing struggle to balance spiritual authority and personal charisma with modern organisational governance principles. This internal conflict is germane to the long-term sustainability, public perception, and ethical standing of these powerful religious institutions.

The proliferation of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria is partly driven by the increased privileges, visibility, and leadership styles of existing leaders, which inspire other aspirants to form similar organisations. This has led to intense competition for members and influence, necessitating a "struggle for distinction" among diverse ministries. The concept of "belonging" is central to understanding identity formation within these movements, defined as conforming to group rules and feeling accepted within a community (Adesoji, 2016). Intellectual debates around identity formation include primordialist (fixed identity), constructivist (malleable identity), and constructed primordiality (a combination of both) approaches, all attempting to explain the dynamic nature of group affiliation.

There is a consequential challenge of leadership succession. Mechanisms of institutionalisation, like the recruitment of wives or the children of founders as board members, are occasionally used to guarantee family succession. The practise may cause the non-family leaders who are more experienced to be pushed away (Adesoji, 2016). The result of this family succession turns spiritual leadership into management of dynastic

resources, as the key interest becomes no longer a charismatic calling, but maintenance of the brand name and financial resources in the biological family of the founder, which makes the church an inheritance of a family and a family property instead of a trust. Solutions designed to ensure gifted ministers do not overshadow founders or their heirs, like sending them to some distant branch or appointing them to less visible duties, also help create internal fragmentation and new churches as well.

The rapid proliferation of churches and the intense competition among leaders highlight a strong entrepreneurial dynamic within the Nigerian Neo-Pentecostal movement. This entrepreneurial model, where individual success often leads to the replication of ministries, while indicative of immense growth and spiritual vitality, also points to a highly decentralised and usually fragmented organisational structure. This structure is driven more by individual charismatic leaders than by a unified ecclesiastical hierarchy. This can contribute to internal rivalries, leadership struggles, and succession disputes, potentially undermining collective accountability, far-reaching theological coherence, and the movement's ability to present a united front on national issues, despite its overall influence.

Another debate to be considered is that of adaptation to modernity and doctrinal purity. Nigerian Neo-Pentecostalism has demonstrated a remarkable capacity for adaptation, embracing modern approaches to expand its reach. This includes adopting "seeker-friendly" strategies, innovative worship styles, and more relaxed dress codes to attract a wider demographic constituency, particularly youth (Clement, 2025).

Churches extensively utilise modern technology, the social media, and contemporary music for evangelism while engaging the younger generations. The movement has also successfully integrated indigenous religious practices, allowing for a continuity of cultural identity that resonates deeply with the Nigerian populace. This can be seen in how Pentecostal churches now live-stream their services on platforms like YouTube and Facebook, enabling participation beyond physical boundaries and creating global audiences. The use of contemporary gospel music, heavily influenced by Afrobeat, hip-hop, and pop styles, appeals to the tastes of younger generations while simultaneously spreading messages of faith.

However, this adaptability is not without its limits, leading to significant internal resistance against what is perceived as "disruptive performativity." Figures like Chukwuemeka Ohanaemere Odumeje, who "seamlessly integrates both elements and maintains no distinction between sacred and secular" in his practices, face strong contestation from established Pentecostal leaders and the public sectors (Popoola, 2025). Criticisms arise when practices deviate too far from established norms, lack clear biblical grounding, or blur the lines between the sacred and the secular. This resistance also extends to the ongoing debate about Nigeria's secularity, with some Pentecostals moving from merely insisting on secularity to actively affirming the imperative to "Christianise" the state.

The strategic adoption of modern tools and cultural elements for outreach and growth presents a pragmatic willingness within Nigerian Neo-pentecostalism to engage with contemporary society. However, the strong reactions against certain "disruptive" expressions, such as those of Odumeje, reveal an ongoing and contentious struggle to define the boundaries of acceptable adaptation. This struggle aims to

prevent perceived compromises to doctrinal purity, traditional authority structures, or the movement's core identity (Popoola, 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the trajectory of 21st-century Nigerian Pentecostalism is effectively interpreted as the evolution of a dynamic, deregulated spiritual economy. “Religious entrepreneurs” have continuously adapted their “product lines”, specifically Prosperity Theology and Spiritual Warfare, to address the existential demands of a populace facing economic instability. While these innovations have successfully secured market share, they have simultaneously precipitated the ethical crises that currently necessitate internal regulatory oversight by bodies such as the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria.

The movement’s expansion into the public sphere represents a strategic consolidation of influence. Through the vertical integration of welfare services and direct political lobbying, these religious firms have established themselves as a “shadow state”, filling the governance vacuum left by institutional failure. This political assertiveness, coupled with a dualistic gender strategy that maximizes human capital while enforcing conservative brand distinctions, positions the movement as a unique model of modernity resistant to secular liberalism. Sustaining this momentum requires a critical “market correction”. The future viability of Nigerian Neopentecostalism will hinge on its capacity to harmonise aggressive entrepreneurial expansion with robust institutional ethics. As the movement exports its brand to the Global North via reverse mission, it not only redefines the centre of global Christian gravity but also serves as a testament to the resilience of faith when structured as a responsive, adaptable market force.

Future scholarship should pivot to the “Digital Spiritual Economy”, examining how social media algorithms are influencing doctrine and how “digital-only” pastors are disrupting the market share of traditional megachurches. Additionally, a comparative analysis of Nigerian Pentecostalism alongside similar markets in Brazil and South Korea is necessary to determine if the “prosperity product cycles” observed here are universal features of Global South Christianity or unique to the Nigerian socio-political context.

REFERENCES

- Adebayo, T. (2020, May 8). Christ Embassy donates 2,000 food packages, feeds 3,000 households in Abuja. *Independent Newspaper Nigeria*. <https://independent.ng/christ-embassy-donates-2000-food-packages-feeds-3000-households-in-abuja/>.
- Adedibu, B. A. (2023). Nigerian Pentecostal megachurches and development: A diaconal analysis of the Redeemed Christian Church of God. *Religions*, 14 (1), 70. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14010070>.

- Adesoji, A. (2016). The new Pentecostal movement in Nigeria and the politics of belonging. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 52(8), 894-908. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909616649209>.
- Adeleke, O., Okunoye, J., & Popoola, T. (2025). Reformation and the Redeemed Christian Church of God: Issues and implications for growth. *Wukari International Studies Journal*, 9(3), 211-221. <https://wissjournals.com.ng/index.php/wiss/article/view/658>.
- Adeleye, C. A., & Aluko, O. P. (2025). Servant leadership and humility: The foundational pillars of The Apostolic Church, Nigeria (TACN). *Light in a Once-Dark World*, 7, 370. https://www.biblicaltheology.com/light/Servant%20Leadership%20and%20Humility_The%20Foundational%20Pillars%20of%20The%20Apostolic%20Church,%20Nigeria%20%28TACN%29.pdf.
- Agochukwu, F. C., & Ogele, E. P. (2025). The paradox of piety: Religiosity, internal conflict, and the Pentecostal denomination's experience in Rivers State, Nigeria. *Journal of Political Science and Leadership Research*, 11(4), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.56201/jpslr.vol.11.no4.2025.pg1.15>.
- Alala, I. M., & Eko, E. E. (2022). Pentecostal mission and development in Nigeria: A periodic analysis of 1990-2015. *CALJOTMAS: Calabar Journal of Liberal Studies* 16(2). <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/cajtlms/article/view/248346/234881>.
- Batard, A. (2020, September). 'Pentecostal Republic' of Nigeria. *Le Monde diplomatique (English edition)* <https://mondediplo.com/2020/09/10/nigeria>.
- Clement, D. T. (2025). The evolution of Pentecostalism in Nigeria: From early movements to contemporary movements. *Port Harcourt Journal of History & Diplomatic Studies*, 12(1), 287-290.
- Ekechi, J. O. (2025). 'Back to sender': Pentecostal prayer forms and language dynamics in Nigeria's contemporary world. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2025.2476741>.
- Finke, R., & Stark, R. (1992). *The churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and losers in our religious economy*. Rutgers University Press.
- Iannaccone, L. R. (1998). Introduction to the economics of religion. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 36(3), 1465-1496.
- Ikem, P. A., Nwachinemere, O. C., & Ogunnubi, O. (2020). Pentecostalism, electoral prophetism and national security challenges in Nigeria. *African Security*, 13(1), 1-26.
- Kaoma, K. J. (2018). *Christianity, globalization, and protective homophobia: Democratic contestation of sexuality in sub-Saharan Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- MacArthur Foundation. (2025, July 9). Equipping Nigeria's Pentecostal leaders to advance accountability. <https://www.macfound.org/press/grantee-publications/equipping-nigerias-pentecostal-leaders-to-advance-accountability>.
- Obadare, E. (2006). Pentecostal presidency? The Lagos-Ibadan 'theocratic class' & the Muslim 'other'. *Review of African Political Economy*, 33(110), 665-678.
- Oderinde, P. A., Owoade, O. B., Abioye, I. A., & Afolabi, O. (2023). Roles of Pentecostalism in the political and economic development of Nigeria between

- 1999 and 2015. *International Journal of Contemporary Research in Humanities*, 1(1), 31-42.
<https://www.journals.lcu.edu.ng/index.php/INJOCORH/article/view/1062>.
- Odey, E. A., & Ajima, O. G. (2020). Pentecostalism and women leadership: Paradigm for gender re-construction in Nigeria. *International Journal of Pedagogy Innovation and New Technologies*, 7(1), 76-83.
<https://doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0014.4461>.
- Odey, E. A., Boypa, O. E., Felix, F. E., Ekpenyong, O. E., Bassey, I. E., Asuquo, O. O., Ella, T. O., & Edet, L. A. (2025). Women's Inclusivity in Neo-Pentecostalism: A recipe for gender-equality in Nigeria. *Pakistan Journal of Life and Social Sciences*, 23(1), 4616-4624. <https://doi.org/10.57239/PJLSS-2025-23.1.00365>.
- Ogunewu, M. A. (2022). Reflecting on tendencies in Nigerian Pentecostalism. *African Theological Journal for Church and Society*, 3(1), 1-4.
- Orogun, D. O., & Pillay, J. G. (2023). Neo-Pentecostal political activism vis-à-vis good governance in Nigeria: A theological analysis. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 44(1), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v44i1.2670>.
- Osisanwo, A., & Alugbin, M. (2024). Pentecostal voices and discourse perspectives on LGBTQ+ narratives in Nigeria. *African Identities*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2024.2427177>.
- Oyedepo, D. [Bishop David]. (2025, July). *Bishop Oyedepo places restrictions on pastors attending ...* [Video]. YouTube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fw3a9OH4jVU>.
- Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, Lagos State. History of PFN Lagos State.
<https://pfnlagosstate.org/history2>.
- Popoola, R. O. (2025). Disrupting or dwelling? Chukwuemeka Ohanaemere Odumeje and Pentecostal performativity in a West African popular and digital culture. *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, 1-19.
<https://doi.org/10.1525/jrpc.2025.2475630>.
- Richman, N. (2020, August 19). Nigerian Pentecostalism. *Database of Religious History*. The University of British Columbia.
<https://religiondatabase.org/browse/1743/>.
- The Guardian. (2019, February 13). Gospel glamour: How Nigeria's pastors wield political power. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/13/gospel-glamour-how-nigerias-pastors-wield-political-power>.
- The Guardian. (2020, May 18). Ofcom: Christian TV network aired Covid-19 conspiracies. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/18/ofcom-christian-tv-network-covid-19-nigeria-coronavirus>.
- Ubuane, G. O. (2020). A hermeneutical critique of prosperity theology in Nigeria. *Icheke Journal of the Faculty of Humanities*, 18(4), 75-78.
- van Klinken, A. (2019). *Kenyan, Christian, queer: Religion, LGBT activism, and arts of resistance in Africa*. Penn State University Press.