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Pentecostalism and Charismatic Movement in Nigeria: Situating the Place of Faith Complementarity and Integration

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of Pentecostal and charismatic movements have reshaped traditional Christian practices while addressing some socio-political challenges. However, there exists a lack of understanding regarding how these movements reconcile diverse beliefs amidst doctrinal tensions and socio-economic influences. Traditional Christian faith is rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ and the early Church, emphasizing biblical authority, sacraments, and moral principles. Pentecostalism and Charismatic movement derive from the teachings of Jesus Christ and the early Church, adopting biblical authority with emphasis on personal spirituality. This paper analyses the development and impact of Pentecostalism and charismatic movements on traditional doctrines, societal dynamics, and inter-religious relationships. The paper is anchored on the social control theory. It was concluded that Pentecostalism promotes spiritual renewal but poses challenges to doctrinal unity in Nigerian Christianity. Recommendations include: (1) Church leaders: provide theological training to uphold doctrinal integrity; (2) Policymakers: establish frameworks for religious tolerance to reduce conflicts; (3) Scholars: explore Pentecostalism's socio-political impacts; (4) Churches: tackle societal challenges, and (5) Educators: integrate Christian faith into curricula for better understanding. These proposals aim to strengthen theological understanding, social harmony, and scholarly dialogue.

Introduction

Traditional Christian faith is grounded in the teachings of Jesus Christ and the early Church, emphasising biblical authority and moral principles. Pentecostalism could be traced to the Protestant Christian movement of the early 20th century while the Charismatic Christian movement is a renewal movement that emanated sometime around the middle of the 20th century. Both movements adapted to Nigeria's dynamic religious landscape, blending local and global influences with a focus on spiritual experiences. This phenomenon is rooted in the historical evolution of Christianity in Nigeria, the most populous nation in sub-Saharan Africa with about 216 million people (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023), faces a complex mix of historical, cultural, ethnic, religious, social, and linguistic challenges (Adogame, 2013), also shaped by indigenous practices and global religious movements, reflecting the unique religious landscape of the country.

Globally, the Charismatic Renewal began in 1960 within Anglicanism. It had spread to other protestant denominations by 1962 but specifically started in the Catholic Church in 1967 at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. By the early 1980s, it had reached approximately

15 million people across 120 countries. Meanwhile, Pentecostalism began with the Azusa street revival in 1906 in Los Angeles. Pentecostalism had emerged early enough before the Charismatic Renewal. This new religious fervor, known as the Charismatic Renewal, began as a sectarian movement in mid-20th century in Africa, but by the 1990s, Pentecostalism had emerged as a global religion, capturing the interest of the media, Christians, non-Christians, and religious scholars alike (Ojo, 2018), and its rapid growth has introduced new theological perspectives and worship practices that resonate with many Nigerians. However, its rapid spread in Nigeria and Ghana has prompted mainline churches to become more welcoming in hopes of preventing the drift of young people to these new churches (Hocken, 2002).

Nigeria's spiritual landscape has historically been shaped by the convergence of African traditional religion, Islam, and Christianity. Specifically, Christianity gained inroads into the country through the arrival of missionaries prior to the colonial period. It however grew more during the colonial dispensation through the establishment of missions, and less integration of African religious practices with Christian teachings. The religion gained further influence after Nigeria's independence, where religious nationalism led to a fusion of African traditions with Christian beliefs. However, the emergence of Pentecostalism and charismatic movements in the 20th century, emphasising personal spiritual experiences, healing, and prophecy, marked a transformative shift. These movements not only grew in numbers but also influenced mainstream Christian denominations, leading to a fusion of traditional and contemporary styles of worship. Furthermore, the historical events that shaped Nigerian Christianity have led to the diversity of Christian denominations in the country (Akinade, 2014). This challenges traditional church structures and necessitates a re-evaluation of theological and doctrinal positions within the Nigerian Christian system.

While the emergence of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in Nigeria has sparked debates about doctrinal purity and spiritual authenticity, the movements have influenced views on societal issues like poverty, healthcare, and education, often promoting personal empowerment and collective well-being. Additionally, they play a significant role in public life by encouraging political participation, advocating for moral values, and addressing social justice issues. Simultaneously, Pentecostal spirituality has influenced many mainline Protestant churches such that evangelical Christians adopt practices like Holy Spirit baptism and speaking in tongues (Quebedeaux, 1975). The growth of these churches challenges traditional religious authorities and demands a reevaluation of their leadership and governance. Yet, understanding their development is vital for academics, religious leaders, and policymakers in addressing Nigeria's societal complexities through the integration of Christian faith.

This study aims to explore the integration of Christian faith, charismatic beliefs, and Pentecostalism in contemporary Nigerian society, focusing on their theological, cultural, and social impact. It seeks to analyse how the Pentecostalism and Charismatic movements shape doctrinal practices, influence societal structures, and affect inter-religious relations. By investigating these dimensions, the study seeks to provide insights into how the movements contribute to the evolving religious landscape of Nigeria and offer recommendations for promoting constructive dialogue and sustainable development within religious communities.

Statement of the Problem

The rapid admixture of charismatic beliefs and Pentecostalism with traditional Christian faith in Nigeria presents a complex and multifaceted challenge. This phenomenon raises questions about doctrinal consistency, theological coherence, and the impact on religious identity and practice.

Additionally, the blending of these movements with traditional African cultural elements complicates how influence of contemporary Nigerian Christianity is understood. Consequently, there is a pressing need to investigate how this integration affects the religious landscape, community dynamics, and broader societal implications in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Travis Hirschi's Social Control Theory as its framework, highlighting that adherence to societal norms and laws depends on strong ties to institutions such as family, school, and religion. Hirschi identifies four key components of the social bond: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief (Costello & Laub, 2020). This framework examines how strong religious ties within Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in Nigeria promote social unity, guide moral conduct, and influence community relationships.

Historical and Cultural Context of Nigerian Christianity

Pre-colonial Nigeria was characterised by a diverse array of indigenous religious practices that varied across ethnic groups and regions. These practices often centered around animism, ancestral worship, and belief in spiritual forces influencing daily life. Essentially, rituals and ceremonies played a significant role in these belief systems, serving to maintain social order, foster community cohesion, and address spiritual needs within traditional African societies. Nigeria, much like other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, is characterised by a complex blend of ethnic, religious, and regional groups, creating overlapping and competing identities. This diversity frequently leads to intense conflicts over state power, resources, and citizenship among the country's 250–400 ethnic groups (Reed & Mberu, 2015).

It was common practice in pre-colonial Nigeria to have traditional religious specialists, such as priests and diviners, mediate between the spiritual and human realms, providing guidance and protection. However, British colonisation aided the spread of Christianity across the country through the instrumentalities of missions and schools. After independence, Christianity solidified as a major religious force, influencing social structures and cultural norms, while also engaging with indigenous belief systems and encouraging religious pluralism. This period also witnessed the emergence of indigenous Christian leaders and theologians who sought to contextualise Christian teachings within the Nigerian cultural framework. Bong (2006) asserts that the contemporary church has supported Western imperialism by reinforcing the dichotomy of God versus servant, and perpetuates a parallelism between the "civilised" West and the "primitive" East. In Nigeria's post-colonial era, challenges like religious syncretism and tensions between traditional beliefs and Western Christian doctrines arose. Despite these obstacles, Christianity adapted to local contexts, fostering societal progress in education, healthcare, and governance through the establishment of churches, schools, and charitable organisations.

The Development of Christianity in Nigeria

The development of Christianity in Nigeria reflects a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and socio-political influences. Initially introduced through missionary efforts during the colonial period, Christianity rapidly grew among various ethnic groups and regions across the country. Over time, Nigerian Christianity has diversified into numerous denominations, including mainstream churches, Pentecostal and charismatic movements, and indigenous syncretic forms; each contributing uniquely to the religious landscape and societal dynamics of contemporary Nigeria. A major shift in Nigerian Christianity, particularly in Western Nigeria, occurred with the rise of the Charismatic Movement in the 1970s, influenced by American and British Pentecostalism in higher

education. Pentecostalism originally arrived in Nigeria in the 1920s and 1930s through The Apostolic Church, Faith Tabernacle, and Assemblies of God (Ojo, 1988).

Apparently, this development has been marked by shifts in theological emphasis, worship styles, and ecclesiastical structures, influenced by both local adaptations and global trends within Christianity. The current charismatic movement in churches globally originated from the early 20th-century Pentecostal movement and has since evolved into a significant international and trans-denominational phenomenon (Baker, 2017), with a focus on religious experience related to the Holy Spirit and the affirmation of charismatic gifts as central to Pentecostal spirituality throughout history (Anderson, 2004). Undoubtedly, Nigerian Christians have played a key role in missions, theological education, and social activism; thereby influencing religious practices and contributing to discussions on ethics, governance, and national identity. Their evolving faith reflects resilience and adaptability, staying connected to its historical roots while engaging with modern societal changes.

Pentecostal and Charismatic Traditions in Nigeria

Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions have significantly shaped Christianity in Nigeria since their emergence in the early 20th Century. These traditions highlight spiritual experiences, divine healing, and the active role of the Holy Spirit in daily life, attracting a broad spectrum of the Nigerian society. Notably, Pentecostalism intersects with various "independent" churches in Nigeria, blurring the lines between Pentecostal and other African Initiated Churches (AIC) in the country (Ukpong, 2006). Unlike missionary churches, African charismatic churches emphasise healing and deliverance, acknowledging the reality and the need to exorcise witchcraft and spiritism. They often attract members from mainline churches, facing accusations of "sheep-stealing." Nonetheless, they have proliferated rapidly, influencing both traditional Christian denominations and contributing to the religious pluralism and dynamism observed in contemporary Nigerian religious practices. Charismatic and Pentecostal traditions have influenced Nigeria's religious culture through expressive worship, prosperity teachings, and deliverance ministries, leading to the rise of mega-churches and influential leaders. These movements have also driven social change by addressing community issues, offering support, and participating in outreach efforts tied to broader societal concerns.

Complementarity and Integration of Charismatic Beliefs and Pentecostalism in Christian Faith

Doctrinal Integration and Liturgical Practices

Traditional Christian faith is grounded on the core teachings of Jesus Christ. It highlights commitment to biblical authority, the practice of sacraments, and the integration of moral values into everyday life. The complementarity and integration of charismatic beliefs and Pentecostalism with traditional Christian faith involves a process of doctrinal adaptation and reinterpretation. Key doctrines such as the baptism of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, and spiritual gifts are emphasised and practiced within charismatic and Pentecostal settings, each with unique theological viewpoints. Recent trends show that Pentecostal pastors have been shifting from traditional Pentecostal beliefs towards more charismatic practices (Cettolin, 2016).

The complementarity of charismatic beliefs and Pentecostalism in Christian faith often leads to distinctive changes in liturgical practices. Charismatic and Pentecostal movements in Nigeria have reshaped liturgy by emphasising spontaneous, emotive worship, such as energetic music, exuberant prayer, and laying of hands for healing. The focus on a participatory worship experience that highlights the Holy Spirit's active presence and supernatural manifestations like speaking in tongues

and prophecy for the most part diverges from traditional formal liturgies. Defining normative charismatic worship is difficult due to its rapid evolution and diverse theological perspectives. Charismatic worship highlights the Holy Spirit's role in joy and personal agency (Chan, 2019), while Pentecostal worship theology is still evolving, with its distinct features continuing to be shaped (Alvarado, 2012).

The Role of the Holy Spirit

The integration of charismatic beliefs and Pentecostalism into Christianity highlights the centrality of the Holy Spirit to a believer's life, emphasizing the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a separate experience following salvation, along with the manifestation of spiritual gifts like speaking in tongues, prophecy, and healing. The rise of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity in Africa is notable for its prominent public presence and its interaction with popular culture of meeting the congregants' needs. Spiritual healing is a core element of Charismatic Christianity, highlighting the belief in the Holy Spirit's power to effect physical, emotional, and social transformation (Kärkkäinen, 2005).

Moreover, the focus on healing is a defining characteristic of the global charismatic movement, transcending cultural and social boundaries (Poloma, 1995). This trend, influenced by electronic globalisation since the 1970s, economic challenges from the 1980s, and political shifts in the 1990s, has been bolstered by advances in media technology (Pype, 2015). Classical dispensationalists, including early church figures like Augustine, Chrysostom, and Hippolytus, argued that the Holy Spirit's activity ended with the apostolic age. This view was held by the church until the late 4th century. However, proponents like Michael Green argue that "healing, prophecy, exorcism, and speaking in tongues did not cease with the last apostle" (Asamoah, 2013, p. 101). In Nigerian charismatic and Pentecostal traditions, the Holy Spirit is seen as a powerful source of empowerment and guidance working to transform individuals and communities.

Healing, Miracles, Prophecy and Spiritual Gifts

The integration of charismatic beliefs and Pentecostalism with Christian faith places a significant emphasis on healing and miracles as tangible expressions of divine power and intervention. These traditions often teach that through faith and the Holy Spirit's work, miraculous healings, deliverances from spiritual oppression, and supernatural interventions are attainable. In Catholic Pentecostalism, which has recently drawn middle-class followers, prophecy plays a crucial role as a direct communication from God to prayer groups through specific members, and the key aspects include glossolalic prophecy, interpretation, confirmation, and discernment, all of which are central to their meetings (McGuire, 1977). The rise of Pentecostalism in Africa is closely tied to how Pentecostals address common fears and challenges, such as sickness, poverty, unemployment, loneliness, and the widespread beliefs in evil spirits and witchcraft (Nkurunziza, 2013). These beliefs and practices not only strengthen faith in divine healing but also enhance the growth and attractiveness of charismatic and Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, where stories of healings and miracles are central to spiritual narratives and community life.

Divine healing is a key element in Pentecostal theology and history (Alexander, 2020). This is rooted in the belief that a transformative and empowering experience, known as the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, follows conversion (Wessels, 1992). Pentecostalism has revitalised Orthodox churches, prompting them to re-engage with their spiritual and evangelical roles and has become a significant force in the religious experience of African Christianity (Ojo, 2023). Similarly, new religious movements in Nigeria arose as a response for the oppressed across cultural, social, religious, and political domains, with the goal of rescuing and revitalising the diminished religions and traditions

of the people (Nwokocha, 2021). The growth of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements has greatly impacted global Christianity, though it risks trivialising spiritual gifts and overemphasising emotional experiences over Christian character. Despite this, the focus on prophecy underscores the continued relevance of divine revelation, enriching the faith expression within Nigerian Christian communities.

The Integration of Christian Faith Within Nigerian Society

Moral Conduct and Leadership

Christian faith, whether Pentecostal, Charismatic, or Protestant, shapes ethical decisions in public and private sectors by promoting moral responsibility, social justice, and accountability. It encourages ethical leadership, community service, and positive societal contributions. Furthermore, integrating Christian principles fosters transparency, trust, and reduced corruption while emphasising values like honesty, integrity, and service to build systems that support sustainable development, fairness, and societal well-being. Leadership involves fostering connections within the church and community. John Wesley, founder of Methodism, emphasised personal holiness, social justice, and community engagement by organising groups to encourage Christian living (Bentley, 2010). However, the focus on spiritual experiences has driven the rapid growth of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches (Khathide, 2002; Pomerville, 2022). Warrington (2008) argues that "while these movements emphasise the Holy Spirit's power and victory, they overlook His role in human weakness and the path to Christlikeness". Notwithstanding, Christianity continues to influence Nigeria's development by tackling corruption and inequality through social reform, education, and political engagement.

Social and Economic Contributions

Christianity's integration into the Nigerian society has fostered interfaith dialogue and religious harmony. Since the rise of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in Africa during the early 1970s, these traditions have positioned them as agents of change, addressing religious and socio-political issues (Ojo, 2012). They have been instrumental in driving community development through initiatives aimed at addressing critical issues such as education, healthcare, and poverty alleviation. Despite predictions of Christianity's decline in the post-decolonisation era, the growth of African independent churches has shown otherwise, demonstrating a localised adaptation of Christian teachings (Gaiya, 2002). Charismatic and Pentecostal movements encourage entrepreneurial growth through teachings on prosperity and financial stewardship, while also promoting self-reliance and economic empowerment within church communities (Kretzschmar, 2007). Significantly, both Protestant and Pentecostal movements foster social cohesion by creating spaces for community engagement and solidarity; thereby shaping norms and values that impact interactions beyond religious contexts in Nigerian society.

Political Engagement and Influence

Church leaders, with their large followers and moral authority, often exert significant influence on political outcomes and policy decisions. Politicians frequently seek the support of mega-church leaders for electoral endorsement or spiritual backing in exchange for political favours such as infrastructure projects and employment opportunities once in power (Ijaola & Aderoju, 2023). Moreover, the #thechurchmustvote hashtag is part of The Church Must Vote (TCMV) initiative, a nonpartisan movement in Nigeria aimed at encouraging Christians to actively engage in the civic process and influence political outcomes (Uwalaka et al., 2020).

Christian faith communities in Nigeria have played a crucial role in mobilising voters, advocating for social justice, and supporting political candidates, as demonstrated by the victories of Rev. Fr. Hyacinth Alia in Benue State and Pastor Umo Eno in Akwa Ibom State during the 2023 elections. Moreover, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) has also been instrumental in promoting ethical governance and equitable representation, which reflects the growing influence of religious leaders in shaping Nigeria's political landscape.

Philosophically, religion is seen as the belief in the "form of the Good," a divine will and mind central to the universe's existence and its moral connection with humanity (Manus, 2006). Nigeria's complex ethnic, religious, and regional diversity often leads to conflicts over resources, state power, and citizenship, with the country housing an estimated 250 to 400 ethnic groups (Reed & Mberu, 2015). Therefore, religious groups and leaders must understand that religiosity devoid of morality weakens Nigeria's societal fabric, since they are called to embrace genuine moral principles and move beyond superficial displays (Atoi et al., 2020). Meanwhile, Christianity continues to drive societal transformation, tackling socio-political issues and advancing national progress through its teachings and community-oriented initiatives.

Challenges and Criticisms

The integration of charismatic beliefs and Pentecostalism in contemporary Nigerian society also brings forth significant challenges and criticisms. Critics argue that these movements sometimes prioritise material prosperity over spiritual growth, leading to financial exploitation of congregants. Undoubtedly, concerns about doctrinal purity and theological inconsistencies in charismatic teachings exist, but Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity has recently transitioned from a marginal role to a major force in Africa's religious landscape (Lindhardt, 2014). Additionally, the rapid growth of charismatic and Pentecostal churches has raised questions about their influence on societal values, cultural practices, and even political stability in Nigeria. Notably, flamboyant lifestyle in the Pentecostal circle influences priests and seminarians, particularly in Nigeria, where the society places high value on wealth, material possessions, and displays of success (Achunike, 2004).

These movements have also faced criticisms regarding their sometimes contentious relationships with established religious institutions and the perceived commercialisation of religious activities. Despite the concerns, the Pentecostal movement has profoundly influenced every aspect of the Nigerian society. Its impact is so extensive that it is nearly impossible to find a Nigerian who has not encountered the message of God in the public sphere. Mainline denominations such as Methodist, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Roman Catholic continue to thrive, but they face challenges as many congregants opt to join Pentecostal churches (Ayuk, 2002).

Moreover, concerns have been raised about the impact of charismatic and Pentecostal practices on social cohesion and communal harmony, particularly in diverse religious settings. Addressing these challenges requires careful scrutiny of their theological foundations, ethical practices, and socio-cultural impacts to foster a balanced dialogue on their role within the Nigerian society. Although, the rapid proliferation of charismatic and Pentecostal churches has led to competition for followers and resources, which can sometimes foster divisiveness within the broader Christian community. In the present era, modesty no longer dictates their lifestyle. Some Pentecostal and Charismatic leaders now present themselves as celebrities, superheroes, and business executives, adopting the social role of "big men of a big God" (Kalu, 2008). This has led to concerns about the regulation and oversight of these churches, particularly regarding financial transparency and accountability. Ethical stewardship in financial and organisational practices is essential for maintaining trust and

integrity within religious movements, because financial mismanagement and lack of transparency can harm credibility. While leadership succession, doctrinal disagreements, and societal responses require mentoring programs to prepare future leaders, charismatic church leaders, often celebrated for their unique talents, may overlook developing young, equally gifted leaders for future succession (Ngomane & Mahlangu, 2014). In most African independent Pentecostal churches (AIPCs), succession is difficult due to the lack of a rotation system for ministers. These churches, led by Africans for Africans, often have founders or long-term pastors who are only succeeded upon retirement, death, or removal for moral failure or incompetence (Matshobane & Masango, 2020). The increasing influence of charismatic and Pentecostal church leaders in Nigeria's political and social spheres has led to discussions about the separation of church and state. This raises concerns about the extent of religious involvement in governance and public policy. Addressing these concerns requires a careful balance of religious freedom, on the one hand, with social responsibility and accountability, on the other hand. In response to Pentecostalism's rapid growth, many mainline churches in Nigeria have incorporated Pentecostal practices, even though some members of these churches continue to criticise this integration and its influence (Diara & Onah, 2014).

Conclusion

This paper has explored the integration of charismatic beliefs and Pentecostalism with traditional Christian faith in contemporary Nigerian society. It has highlighted the theological, cultural, and socio-economic impacts of these movements, underscoring their role in shaping religious practices, community dynamics, and societal values. The findings illustrate a dynamic landscape where charismatic and Pentecostal churches contribute significantly to spiritual vitality, social engagement, and economic development, while also facing challenges related to doctrinal coherence, like prosperity teachings, ethical governance, and societal influence. Understanding these findings is essential for comprehending the complexities and opportunities within Nigerian Christianity and informing future research and policy decisions. The paper emphasizes that Pentecostal and Charismatic movements possess significant potential to influence socio-political structures and tackle societal challenges, underscoring the importance of collaboration among religious, academic, and policy stakeholders.

Furthermore, this study enhances academic scholarship by offering a detailed analysis of the integration of charismatic beliefs and Pentecostalism in Nigerian Christianity, focusing on its theological, cultural, and socio-economic aspects. It also enriches discussions on religious pluralism, doctrinal adaptation, and the socio-political impact of contemporary religious movements, making it a valuable resource for scholars in religious studies, sociology, and African studies.

Recommendations

1. **Promote Ethical Leadership:** Charismatic and Pentecostal leaders should prioritise transparency, accountability, and ethical stewardship in financial and organisational practices to enhance trust and credibility within their congregations.
2. **Enhance Theological Education:** Comprehensive theological training programs that integrate both traditional Christian doctrines and charismatic perspectives should be developed to equip clergy and laity alike to navigate theological complexities and foster doctrinal coherence.
3. **Facilitate Inter-Denominational Dialogue:** Constructive dialogue and collaboration should be encouraged among denominational leaders to promote understanding, unity, and cooperation across diverse theological and doctrinal perspectives within the Christian circle in Nigeria.
4. **Support Social Justice Initiatives:** Charismatic and Pentecostal churches should actively engage in social justice initiatives, including advocacy for human rights, poverty alleviation programs, and community development projects to address societal challenges effectively.

5. Strengthen Research and Scholarship: There should be investment in research that explores the long-term social, economic, and political impacts of charismatic and Pentecostal movements in Nigeria, providing empirical evidence to inform policy decisions, enhance community outreach efforts, and foster sustainable development.

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