

The Pentecostal Experience in the Lower Cross River Region: Illumination or a Quest for Freedom 1960-2015

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ABSTRACT

Any study of the spread of Christian churches in the Lower Cross River Region would indicate that there has been a gradual push towards Pentecostalism and Evangelical Christianity. A number of factors are responsible for this. The Reformation, which began in Germany between 1517 and 1600 and spread to the rest of the world, was a shift from traditional Christian doctrine and practices. Through deep study of the Bible, Luther advocated the end of a number of ancient Christian practices like penance on the basis that vital parts of scripture were being ignored. The information was hinged on the revelation from Habakkuk 2 vs. 4 that the just shall live by faith. It has, however, been observed that a number of churches that emerged from the reformation, like the Lutheran, Methodist, Apostolic, Presbyterian, and Assemblies of God, have all gravitated steeply towards traditional Catholic practices. This has led to a discourse in Christian circles, with the argument being that the old way could be better. Preachers of Pentecostalism have often been referred to as "Pente-rascals," indicating that they have used the Pentecostal movement as an excuse for rascality. Evidence abounds to support this assertion, ranging from diversion of church funds, outright embezzlement of church funds, seduction by the clergy, false doctrine, and an opulent lifestyle. These practices have become common place in Pentecostal circles to the extent that a number of the uninformed see Christian ministry as a profession for lazy people who do not want to work. The flamboyant lifestyles of ministers of the gospel, their unguarded utterances, and tendency to manipulate and extort, which is in stark contrast to the gospel which Jesus preached, lends credence to this. Hence, this tends to support the argument that the push towards Pentecostalism is driven by a desire for freedom and liberty. These are the issues that this article will seek to address. The article will make use of primary and secondary sources.

Keywords: Pentecost, Holy Spirit, Manipulation, Liberty, Orthodox, Reformation, Catholic.

INTRODUCTION

The lower Cross River region refers to the regions in Cross River State that include Odukpani Local Government Area, Obubra, Calabar Municipality, and Calabar South. There has been an explosion of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, with many new missions founded in the last twenty-five years. Attempts have been made by distinguished scholars to explain this phenomenon in learned journals, books, and other such scholarly publications. This publication will attempt to discuss the different variants of the argument and discussion and arrive at its own scholarly position. After Nigerian Independence in 1960, this region (the Lower Cross River Region) was dominated by Orthodox churches. Significant in this regard were the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church, the Methodist Church, the Apostolic Church, Assemblies of God, Mount Zion Light House, and different variants of the charismatic renewal ministries. Most individuals were content with the traditional mode of worship handed down by the missionaries, and with most of the initial educated populace trained in mission schools, most individuals deferred to the traditional ways of worship. From the late 1970s, however, a wind of Pentecostal change began to blow. A number of Nigerian ministers of the gospel stated that they had received a call from God and proceeded to become founders of Nigerian-based ministries.

A number of the protégées of these early founder ministers of the gospel proceeded to break off from the mother churches and found their own independent ministries in a splintering

process that is still going on today. Today, there are a number of very popular Pentecostal ministries that are dotted all over the lower Cross River region with quite a significant following. These would include ministries like the Deeper Life Church, The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), the Living Faith Church (Winners Chapel), Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFM), Dunamis Church, Believers Love World (Christ Embassy) and many others. These churches have brought a new church experience, what many would term a new Pentecostal experience, in the period under review in this publication (1960-2015). A lot of the new practices, even some of the strange abuses and excesses, have been hinged on the scripture from 2 Corinthians 3 vs. 17 that states that “Now the Lord is that Spirit, and where the spirit of God is, there is liberty”. This scripture is often quoted while ignoring other scriptures like 1 Corinthians 14:40 that state that all things should be done decently and in order. These newer Pentecostal ministries offer a more interesting flavor of the gospel, more liberty in praise, worship, and dressing, and an increased insistence that a Christian is supposed to be in good health and prosper. A number of the older Orthodox churches have adopted the worship patterns of these Pentecostal ministries as there is an abundance of scriptural backing to justify the new ways of worshipping God.

The question then is asked as to what is driving this new and renewed push towards Pentecostalism. Some argue that, as was discovered by Martin Luther, a number of the practices of the old Orthodox churches are hinged on Pagan tradition and need to be discarded. Others argue that it is a search for liberty and greater freedom, and for the dubious ministers of the gospel, a greater opportunity to fleece their flock. These are the viewpoints that this paper will attempt to elaborate, deliberate, and discuss.

A CHURCH’S BRIEF HISTORY

The Church, in general terms, refers to a body of individuals who are followers of Christ. The Church in this context is not a house as the uninformed would be tempted to believe but rather a body of individuals referred to as believers, who believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that he came to the world in the flesh and that he died for their sins. According to Christian history, the meeting place of believers was referred to as the tabernacle or temple in the Old Testament and in the Gospels. Peter the Apostle of Christ is often referred to as the founder of the modern church because of a statement made by Jesus in response to a revelation Peter had. The Bible records that Jesus addressing Peter stated, “Thou art Peter, and upon this Rock will I build my Church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it”. The disciples and the Apostles, especially Paul, documented the teachings of Christ, which, in addition to the Old Testament records, formed the foundation for Christian living. According to records, the followers of Christ were first called Christians at Antioch, and through extensive missionary activities, Christianity as a religion spread across Europe and Asia. The first church in existence was the Roman Catholic Church. Such was the general acceptability of the Christian way of life that it led King James to commission the translation of the entire Bible into the version commonly referred to as the King James Version.

The Roman Catholic Church inherited a lot of practices from Roman and Byzantine culture, and a number of these practices had no scriptural bearing. Notable among these practices was the practice of paying for remission of sins, otherwise known as penance. This practice continued unabated for years, with greedy priests taking advantage of the guilt factor to enrich themselves. According to Wikipedia, the Christian Church is an ecclesiological term referring to what different Christian denominations conceive as being the true body of Christians or the original institution established by Jesus. For many Protestant Christians, the Christian Church has two components: the Church visible, institutions in which the word of God is purely preached and

listened to and the sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution; and the Church invisible, all who are truly saved, these being members of the visible church.

The church began in Roman Judea in the first century AD/CE, founded on the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. The Church gradually spread throughout the Roman Empire, gaining a foothold in major cities such as Jerusalem, Antioch, and Edessa. The Roman authorities persecuted followers of the Christian faith because they refused to make sacrifices to the Roman gods. The Church was legalized by the Roman Empire and promoted by Emperors Constantine I and Theodosius I in the 4th Century as the State Church of the Roman Empire, hence the name, the Roman Catholic Church. This state of the church continued for years until Martin Luther led the reformation in the 16th century.

THE TRANSFORMATION

The Protestant Reformation, also known as the Reformation, was a religious reformation that occurred in the Western Church in the 16th century. Its greatest leaders were undoubtedly Martin Luther and John Calvin. The reformation had far-reaching political, economic, and social effects. It became the basis for the founding of Protestantism, one of the three major branches of Christianity. The Reformation took place in Europe between 1517 and 1600. The world of the late medieval Roman Catholic Church, from which the 16th century reformers emerged, was a complex one. Over time, the Church, particularly the papacy, had become deeply involved in Western Europe's political life.

The resulting intrigues and political manipulation, combined with the church's increasing power and wealth, contributed to the bankruptcy of the church as a spiritual force. Abuses such as the sale of indulgences (or spiritual privileges) by the clergy and other charges of corruption undermined the church's spiritual authority. These instances must be seen as exceptions, however, no matter how much they are played up by polemicists. It would not be accurate to state that the reformation of the 16th century was unprecedented. Within the medieval church, reformers within the medieval church such as St. Francis of Assisi, Valdes (founder of the Waldenesians), Jan Hus, and John Wycliffe addressed aspects of the life of the church in the centuries before 1517. In the 16th century, Erasmus of Rotterdam, a great humanist scholar, was the chief proponent of liberal Catholic reform that attacked popular superstitions in the Church and urged the imitation of Christ as the supreme moral teacher.

These reveal an ongoing concern for renewal within the Church in the years before Luther is said to have posted his Ninety-five Theses on the door of the Castle Church, in Wittenburg, Germany, on October 31, 1517, the eve of All Saints' Day, the traditional date for the beginning of the Reformation. Martin Luther claimed that what distinguished him from previous reformers was that while they attacked corruption in the life of the church, he went to the theological root of the problem, which was the perversion of the church's doctrine of redemption and grace. Luther, a pastor and professor at the University of Wittenburg, deplored the entanglement of God's free gift of grace in a complex system of indulgences and good works. He stated boldly, as backed by scripture, that the just shall live by faith. He attacked the indulgence system in his ninety-five theses, insisting that the Pope had no authority over purgatory and that the doctrine of the merits of saints had no foundation in the gospel.

PENTECOSTALISM IN NIGERIA AND THE LOWER CROSS RIVER REGION

Professor Ayandele has stated that Christian missionary activity was the spiritual wing of secular imperialism. Through this statement, he averred to the fact that no matter the claims of sincere motives by the missionaries, their activities provided a platform to spread and strengthen the grip of the European Imperialists. Christianity was essentially spread through the activities of

missionaries and explorers who left schools and churches as part of their heritage and legacy (Ottuh et al., 2014). There is an argument by Eurocentric scholars that the expedition to Africa was essentially a civilizing mission with the intent to get Africans out of barbaric and ungodly practices. This argument attempts to ignore the strong economic motives that forced Europeans to occupy and colonize the African continent. This economic motive was thoroughly explored and elaborated upon in Walter Rodney's flagship book, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. In the book, Rodney explored the devastating damage done to the African continent through slavery and colonialism. Rodney further explored how Africa and Africans were turned into economic hewers of wood and drawers of water.

The lower Cross River region, specifically Calabar, was one of the first regions in the area now known as Nigeria to have contact with the Europeans. In the scramble and partition of Africa that took place at the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, the Nigerian region was allocated to the British Empire. Hence, naturally, some of the first churches in the region were the Church of Scotland Mission, the Presbyterian Church, the Anglican Church, the Lutheran Church, and the Roman Catholic Church. These churches had affiliated schools and hospitals that helped spread goodwill, hope, and support to the colonized enclave. Indeed, a number of streets, roads, schools and markets in Calabar are named in honour of the missionaries, explorers and colonial masters. These institutions include the Watt Market, Hope Waddell Training Institute, St. Patrick's College, Goldie Road, Mary Slessor Avenue, among many others. The ancient city of Calabar therefore developed and evolved as a conservative enclave, taking the outlook of the early missionaries who settled in the region. Pentecostalism is hence a recent occurrence in the region. Pentecostalism, hence, refers to the group of believers who specifically believe in the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit as an inward witness, a comforter, a guide, and the very essence of God in man who works out his attributes and character. The Pentecostals believe in a personal relationship with God and believe that every believer can have direct access to God.

According to Apata, G.O. (2010), the outworking of the Pentecostal ministry is patterned after the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, where the Apostles worked in such liberty, power, and authority that the scriptures record that these were the men that turned the world upside down. Indeed, the day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts Ch.1, is the day the spirit of God fell on the Apostles as cloven tongues, empowering them for the work of the ministry. They, hence, as recorded in the Bible, operated in great authority and performed signs, wonders, and mighty deeds. In the view of the Pentecostals, the outworking in the Book of Acts is God's original template, which was stifled by Roman culture and tradition. There is hence a need to return to the original format and template as the gospel was made of no effect by the tradition of the elders as stated in the scriptures.

The challenge, however, has been that the liberty which Pentecostalism affords the believer has been abused by members of the clergy. Instances abound in the lower Cross River region of the clergy manipulating people out of their hard-earned money and resources. There are instances of individuals receiving prophecies that they should hand over their property to pastors. In many Pentecostal churches, the scriptural revelation in the book of Galatians that whatever a man sows, he will reap has been twisted out of proportion. Accusations abound of pastors and other such spiritual leaders harassing and intimidating individuals, taking possession of people's cars, houses, land, and wives, sometimes through threats and at other times through the use of charms. The challenge faced by the congregants is that these Pentecostal ministers of the gospel always insist on speaking as oracles of God, leaving no room for confirmation by their congregants. No matter how pious or well-intentioned a person may seem, when the person claims to have heard from God before tabling a request, there is usually no way to confirm the authenticity of such claims. This latitude for manipulation has drawn many ministers of the Gospel from Orthodox circles into

Pentecostal (Founder-President) ministries where no board of trustees or council of elders can hold them accountable. It can thus be stated that an escape from accountability could be a major reason for the exodus of young ministers of the gospel from the Bible schools of the older Orthodox churches.

Apata notes further that another attraction for young converts, which has seen them migrate from the Orthodox churches to the Pentecostal churches, has been the prosperity message. Bishop David Olaniyi Oyedepo of the Living Faith Church is a pioneer of this message in Nigeria. Many smaller denominations in the lower Cross River region also preach this message. It is hinged on the scripture (3 John vs.2) that states, “Beloved, I wish above all things that you prosper, even as your soul prospers.” The advocates of this message reiterate that it is God’s will for the born-again Christian to prosper. Where a Christian is not prospering, he could be living in willful sin or experiencing a trial of faith like Job in the Bible. The sincere proponents of this message encourage believers to work hard, give their tithes and offerings, and to live a sincere and honest life marked by diligence in the workplace. Sadly, this prosperity message has been gravely abused by the corrupt and mischievous. These sets of proponents emphasize giving as the solution to all financial problems. They encourage their adherents to give to the point of exhaustion, stating that the more they give, the more they will receive. These pastors often do not care about the source of their members’ wealth and live flamboyant and opulent lifestyles, claiming that their God is not a poor God. Christians are traditionally known to live a moderate and disciplined lifestyle, emulating the teachings and example of Jesus Christ. Hence, believers who want to be as Christ-like as possible are often drawn to the teachings and practices of the Orthodox churches.

Liberty and greater freedom of expression are another reason why a lot of young Christians opt for Pentecostal churches as opposed to the Orthodox (Ottuh, 2020). In Pentecostal churches, there is liberty to sing, act, dance, and mime, hence making the content of the services richer and more rewarding. This is in stark contrast to the services in Orthodox churches, which a number of young people describe as boring. Some have gone as far as stating that an undue emphasis on an order of service has often stifled and “frozen” the outworking of the gifts and manifestations of the Holy Spirit. It is, however, interesting to note that a lot of these Pentecostal churches have gravitated steeply towards Orthodox practices, both in form and practice. A lot of the Pentecostal pastors that began their ministry dressed casually are now decked out like Catholic bishops and priests, and a lot of the churches have changed from offering baked bread to the communion wafer. This steep gravitation towards Orthodox practices indicates that with regards to Christianity, people prefer that there be decency and order. On the other hand, and in an effort to balance out the argument, it must be noted that a lot of the Orthodox churches in the Lower Cross River region have started adopting Pentecostal practices and have made significant efforts to bring greater liberty into their services. Notable in this regard are the Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church, and the Methodists. The key word is “balance”, hence the Pentecostal and Orthodox practices. Our research findings have indicated that churches that have been able to achieve some form of balance have consequently recorded sustained membership and increased loyalty.

Initial African contact with Christianity began with contact with the slave traders in the 15th century. In the lower Cross River region, these slave drivers and traders transacted with middle men who captured slaves from the hinterland and sold them into slavery. Some of these slaves were captured brutally, chained and marched under distressing conditions to the coast, where they were exported to the new world. It is important to place the activities of these European slave dealers in context. Black Africans were captured and exported to a strange location against their will, transported under gruesome circumstances, and deployed to perform hard, back-breaking labor with little or no compensation. This was thus the perception of Europeans, Christian or not, among Africans and residents of the lower Cross River region. The slave traders and colonialists

also attempted, with great success, to use Christianity as a tool of social change. On the African continent, churches were established near the palaces of the Chiefs and Kings, names of adherents were changed from African names to Christian European ones, and on the African continent, Christianity was dubbed the white man's religion (Onimhawo & Ottuh, 2007; Ottuh, 2008). The initial adherents thus strived rigourously to bring in an African flavor to the religion supposedly forced down their throats by the white man.

A lot of the initial independent churches founded by Africans, like the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), were established around and about the time of Nigeria's independence (1st October 1960) and were seen by many scholars as a religious exercise in self-affirmation. No longer was the God of the Bible to be seen exclusively as the white man's God; he was now seen as the God of Pa Akindayomi, the God of Oyedepo, the God of Oyakhilome, the God of Olukoya, the God of Kumuyi, and the God of Dr. Paul Enenche. A lot of pastors, especially Pastor Mathew Ashimolowo of Kingsway International Christian Centre, have also gone to great lengths in their teachings and publications to refute the hamitic hypotheses. The hamitic hypothesis states derogatorily that Africans are the descendants of Ham, one of Noah's sons who looked on his nakedness and was cursed. The consequence of this curse, according to the hypotheses, was that they had become benighted and were not capable of independent thought, actions, development, or indeed anything of significance. Indeed, to quote the words of Hugh-Trevor Roper, a Professor at Oxford University, when asked by his students to take them on a course in African History, he replied, "For now there is nothing that can be called African History. Maybe in the future there will be, but for now there is nothing, and all that exists of African history are the exploits of Europeans on the Continent. The rest is darkness, and darkness is not a subject of history." The direct implication of this statement is that nothing of significance has ever been achieved by Africans without the input of Europeans or Asians. This would suggest that Africans were a lower breed with deficient mental capabilities.

IN THE NAME OF THE LORD

In Christian circles, and indeed in the world of religion, the name of God is sacrosanct, holy, and revered. God is holy, righteous, loving, caring, fair, just, kind, and faithful. These characteristics are fully possessed by the creator, and they are imbued on his followers through a relationship with him. God is perfect and infallible, and so everything that he does is right. Human beings are different in behavior and inclinations, and while a significant number of people do not believe in God, a very large number believe in a supreme being who orders the affairs of men. No one has seen God at any given time, and most individuals use the complex nature of man, nature, and the sophisticated planet as the basis and grounds for the argument for the existence of an intelligent being. Thus, a relationship with God is usually based on personal conviction and encounters. Hence, in relationships with God, anyone can claim to have heard anything from the Holy Spirit and force his adherents to accept it. A good case in point is the Reverend Jim Jones in Guyana, who forced his followers to take poison with the misguided belief that they were moving straight into eternity.

For the believer, the Bible is both a guide and the final authority. The doctrines and commandments contained in the Holy Bible, hence, provide instruction, reproof, doctrine, and correction for the born-again believer. The authority of the word of God over the believer is, however, what charlatans and other questionable elements exploit by twisting and misinterpreting the Holy Scriptures to their advantage. portions of the bible, such as where Jesus told his disciples to abandon all and follow him (Matthew 4 vs. 21-22), Abraham was told to sacrifice his only son on Mount Moriah (Genesis Ch.22 vs. 1-14), the rich young ruler was asked to sell all that he owned, give it to the poor, and follow Christ (Matthew 19 vs. 16-22), and believers sold all that

they had and laid it at the Apostles' feet. The flock has been told that there is a Prophet's blessing that is proportionate to the Christian's seed. Through subtle manipulation, many have been duped and defrauded, leaving them stranded, hopeless and despondent.

Throughout history, religion has been used as an excuse for man's actions whether good or bad. The crusades and the jihads were waged on the basis of a just war, and the Crusaders or Jihadists assumed they were doing God a favour by waging a bloody war against unbelievers. Throughout history, religion has been a thorny issue and many despicable actions have been committed on the basis of religion. People have been murdered, executed, burnt and hung because it was presumed that they were possessed with demons. Individuals like Joan of Arc and William Tyndale bore the bitter brunt of religious extremism. The name of God because of the infallible nature of God was often used as an excuse for questionable actions. When the United Nations was chartered in 1945, human rights advocates pushed for the freedom of religion and worship to be enshrined as a fundamental human right. This was to prevent abuses, pogroms, discrimination, segregation and all such prejudiced acts. This has gone a long way to check the excesses of religious fanatics as would be offenders know that they would likely face the full brunt of the law if apprehended.

In the lower Cross River region, instances abound of flagrant and ridiculous abuse of people's rights and privileges by those entrusted with spiritual authority. A greater number of these excesses have been recorded in Pentecostal circles, leading to widespread outcry and a push for greater control of ministers of the Gospel by the governing councils of churches. Pastors have particularly been known to abuse their female members sexually. Many an innocent young girl or woman seeking help, deliverance, or counseling has been defiled by ministers of the Gospel. In some ludicrous instances, the ministers of the gospel have claimed that sexual intercourse was a means of healing and that their reproductive organs possessed some strange and peculiar healing capabilities. Sadly, there has always been some nave, gullible woman who, in desperation, would accede to such ludicrous sexual demands. The more incredulous instances have been recorded in prayer houses, healing homes, and white garment churches. A number of these perverted ministers of the gospel have ascribed to themselves an image that is larger than life, using this strange aura and charisma to entrap the gullible.

The prosperity message has also assumed shocking dimensions, with many pastors assuming the role of unofficial money doublers. Messages that encourage faith, hope, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, resilience, courage, humility, integrity, and diligence have been thrown out the window with all sorts of spurious prosperity messages preached from the pulpit. The Prosperity preachers, often in a bid to give credence to their message, have waded into the shallow waters of financial flamboyance, living in ostentatious opulence, and have become known for their boastful, arrogant statements. The consequence of this undue emphasis on material prosperity has been the compartmentalization of the congregations into the haves and the have nots. The well-to-do members of the congregation have often been ordained into honourable positions in the church and have been accorded the right of attention by the clergy. This has often led to squabbles and rancour within the church and was the reason for the rebuke in the book of James Ch.(2.vs. 1-9) in the Bible.

In the book of Galatians, Ch. 6, the Bible states emphatically that whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. Jesus, the grand Patriarch of Modern Christianity in his teachings, also stated that if a Christian gives, it will come back to him, good measure, pressed down, shaking together and running over. Oral Roberts of Tulsa, Oklahoma, in the United States, popularized the concept of seed faith in his works based on the above stated scriptures. Like most things spiritual, these teachings were blown out of proportion by subsequent adherents and used as a deadly tool of manipulation. In the lower Cross River region, it has sadly been observed that hard work, diligence,

and character have been replaced by the prosperity message as a means to success and a way out of poverty. This has led to an upsurge in falsehood and pretence, with people resorting to dubious means in a bid to live a flamboyant lifestyle. A significant number of members of the clergy have also been accused of involvement in money laundering and graft, oftentimes telling lies even from the pulpit to justify their opulent lifestyles.

According to Ukpong, D.P (2014), it can be stated that, to a reasonable extent, the Pentecostal experience or the upsurge in the growth of Pentecostal churches can partly be attributed to the flamboyant, larger-than-life image a good number of Pentecostal pastors paint before their congregation. A good number of these pastors drive very exotic cars, live in very posh estates, and some even own private jets. In their messages, they often reiterate that if you are obedient to their instructions, you will get the same results that they have gotten. Principal among these instructions is the continuous command to sow into the ministry. In a desire to live this same opulent lifestyle, a significant number of people have been drawn into a fatalistic relationship with these pastors, with some captured on camera thrashing their members, body slamming them, kicking and beating them and stripping them of all their life's work. The arrogant behavior of some of these pastors would indicate that they feel these members can never do without them. A lot of members of Pentecostal churches have openly confessed that even after liquidating their life savings for a church project, they have been openly scorned by these pastors. On social media, a pastor was captured rinsing his dirty feet on people's heads with the claim that he was releasing virtue for prosperity. Another was captured grooving the buttocks of married women in front of the congregation under the pretext that he was empowering them for prosperity. It is images and reports like this which are now on public display that have brought the Pentecostal movement into disrepute. It is behavior like this that led Dr. Uduak Benjamin Udofia of the Intercessors for Nigeria Ministries (IFN) to describe the bulk of Pentecostal pastors as "Pente-Rascals" in his weekly radio series tagged "Fulfilling Your Destiny" on the Akwa Ibom Broadcasting Corporation Radio Station (AKBC), alluding to the fact that they have used the freedom that Pentecostalism affords as an excuse to get into rascality.

THE QUEST FOR LIBERTY

It was Jaques Roseau, the French philosopher, who said that "Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains". All the major world civilizations before the 20th century were built on the backs of slaves, and incidentally, Calabar, the headquarters of Cross River State, was a major slave port. A large part of the early history of Africa was spent refuting the works of Eurocentric scholars. This perhaps explains why a good number of early historians were committed to research undertakings on slavery and colonialism. No normal human being enjoys slavery, bondage, or any other form of captivity. This may be why Africa, Asia, and Latin America have produced so many renowned freedom fighters. One of the most outstanding freedom fighters to come out of Africa, Nelson Mandela, published an autobiography titled "The Long Walk to Freedom" that documents the role he and other freedom fighters, and indeed the whole African Continent, played in South Africa's push to be free from the shackles of Colonialism. The Church in the lower Cross River region has had a similar experience with its quest for freedom, with congregants becoming more and more expressive in their desire to worship God in Spirit and in Truth. As a consequence of this desire for greater freedom of worship, a number of the older Orthodox churches are accepting and adopting practices from the Orthodox Churches like protracted fasting at the beginning of the year, Revival Programmes, Healing Programmes, Breakthrough Programmes, Deliverance and Counselling Sessions, and many other social programmes that interest the youth.

According to Apata G.O (2010), the question must hence be asked as to how the newer Pentecostal churches arrived at these more exciting forms of worship. In the view of the researchers that wrote this article, the leaders of the newer Pentecostal churches were more given to a diligent study of the scriptures while the older churches were stuck in religious routine, order, and form. As a consequence, these Pentecostal pastors discovered the scriptural position on a number of issues, and after heated arguments and debates, they were always proven to be right. This attention to the word of God has great consequence in the Christian fold. There have been a significant number of inter-marriages among people from different denominations in recent times, and walls of division that once hindered good relations in the Christian fold have been torn down. The diligent and thorough study of the word of God is being encouraged in Orthodox circles, and this has led to a greater understanding of the differences between denominations and churches.

According to ministers of the Gospel in the Pentecostal fold, the infilling of the Holy Spirit gives greater insight and understanding of the Word of God. This insight is referred to as a revelation in Pentecostal circles and is a major facilitator and catalyst of the Pentecostal movement in the lower Cross River region. The Bible and the preached word of God are meant to provide practical wisdom for living. While the older denominations tend to preach in strict order and form, in the newer Pentecostal churches, the pastors espouse knowledge from the word of God on a broad number of life issues. This tends to make the ministration of the word of God from Pentecostal circles more exciting and exhilarating. The preaching is often accompanied by shouts and chants from the congregation, with some going as far as lifting chairs up when there is a special or peculiar insight from the word of God. This expression of excitement during worship is often accompanied by sweet melodies from the instrumentalists and drummers, which at times work the congregation into a frenzy. It is, however, sad to note that it is in the midst of this frenzy that fraudulent pastors often make unscrupulous and ludicrous demands for money.

The search for freedom in Pentecostal circles is often an interesting and exciting study. The question must thus be asked, freedom from what? As has been earlier discussed in this paper, the newer denominations offer a more exciting and interesting form of worship that appeals particularly to the younger generation. The Catholic Church, for instance, is high on protocol, procedure, and form. These practices have been handed down from one generation to the other, and they tend to make the service quite predictable and perhaps boring to the uninformed. It is, however, interesting to note that a lot of Pentecostal churches that started out as free-worshipping Christian gatherings have literally evolved into the mould of the Catholic Church in form, victuals, and practice. This reversion to old forms of worship has led to the question as to whether the older orthodox churches have an overbearing influence as the parent churches or whether they actually follow a more orderly and controlled form of worship. In the view of the researchers pursuing this research undertaking, it is actually a combination of the two factors that have led to a gradual reversion to traditional practices. A lot of the Pentecostal churches, for instance, have included the use of hymns in their worship services, and a number of their pastors have reverted to traditional sanctuary construction and are now adorned with bishop robes.

From a survey of respondents who have attended both Pentecostal and Orthodox churches, it is a delicate blend of both the Orthodox and the Pentecostal and a constant effort to achieve a balance that is most attractive to the average church goer. Most Christians, like most individuals, do not like extremism or unbalanced worship. Hence, most individuals gravitate towards balanced and wholesome places of worship. A dislike for extremism is found not only in Christian folds but also in the Muslim world, where radicals and fundamentalists have tended to leave destruction in their wake. This has led to an onslaught against Islamic fundamentalism by international security agencies like the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the MOSAD, the KGB, the M15 and M16, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). It can thus be concluded that moderation is vital to

spiritual worship, and particularly Christian worship. Younger ministers of the gospel setting out from seminaries, Bible colleges, and other such places of spiritual training must thus be counseled, advised, and admonished to abstain from all forms of unbalanced ministration and extreme doctrinal leanings.

Indeed, it can be stated emphatically that one of the reasons for church wandering is a sense of discontent and a search for freedom. The question must thus be asked again in this research undertaking: freedom from what? Most people who have migrated from churches want freedom from Orthodox form and order. A freedom to shout and sing uninhibitedly and, indeed, dance with the Spirit of David. In Pentecostal circles, it is generally accepted that strict adherence to an order of service hinders the movement of the Spirit. In Acts Chapter 1, it is stated that the Holy Spirit came into the place where the disciples were like a mighty rushing wind. Any student of geography familiar with wind movement knows that the movement of wind is unpredictable and changes in variation and direction every day. The entrance of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was likened to a mighty rushing wind, thus it is deduced that his operations during Christian worship should have some variety and unpredictability to it. It is also widely argued that the Order of Service snuffs out one of the key components of Christian life, which is prayer. Hence, while the other practices are pleasing to the eye, after the Sunday service, the Christian is not spiritually energized for godly living but has rather been lulled to sleep. Most churches have made commendable efforts to remedy this by having specially dedicated services for prayers and the study of the Word.

Another factor that, according to Diarra, B and Onah, N (2014), has drawn throngs of people to Pentecostal churches is the free practice and expression of spiritual gifts. The gifts of healing, deliverance, the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, and prophecy all find free expression in these Pentecostal churches. Africans generally ascribe almost any negative experience to spiritual causes, so when someone dies unexpectedly, there is usually some traditional investigation involving the use of sorcery and divination to ascertain the cause. For those who do not want to dabble in sorcery and divination as a solution to their problems, these Pentecostal churches have become the safest places to go. Most of the time, even when people commit unpardonable blunders, they are always quick to blurt out that it was the Devil's work. Hence, the deliverance ministry became a very viable one in the Lower Cross River region. Today, in the lower Cross River region, there are ministries that are wholly committed to the ministration of deliverance to the oppressed and afflicted. The most prominent, and perhaps the most effective, of these deliverance ministries in the Lower Cross River region is the Mountain of Fire and Miracles (MFM) ministry, founded by Dr. D.K. Olukoya. This ministry is wholly committed to liberating the oppressed from bondage, though some have accused its preachers and adherents of making people paranoid by attributing every negative mishap to a spiritual cause.

In the Holy Scriptures, Jesus encountered a Mad Man in Gadara among the tombs. The solution Jesus gave was not some herbal treatment or therapy, but rather, Jesus cast out the demon that afflicted the man, and the scriptures record that the man sat there clothed in his right mind. Based on this scripture and perhaps countless experiences in African Traditional Religion (ATR), every case of insanity or mental disorder in the lower Cross River region is usually attributed to a spiritual cause. Medical science has, however, proven this to be untrue, providing biological and medical reasons for mental disorders and proffering drugs, medication, and therapy that have proven to be reasonably effective. It is interesting to note that Calabar is home to a Federal Psychiatric Hospital and that this hospital, which was the first of its kind in Nigeria, actually began as an asylum for the mentally deranged. This is testament to the number of people with mental disorders in the region. Indeed, it is common in city folklore to hear that someone was sent mad

because he confronted a notorious witch or that someone is wandering on the road because he disobeyed a traditional sacrilege like sleeping with a married woman, for instance.

Thus, when instances of insanity occur in the lower Cross River region, the recourse is usually to a spiritual solution, often to the exclusion of medical science. Jesus stated in (Mark 16:17-19) that these signs will follow those who believe. In the name of Jesus, they shall cast out demons, they shall heal the oppressed, they shall open the eyes of the blind, and when they lay hands on the sick, they shall recover. With these assurances from the Holy Scriptures, many who do not want to solve a diabolical problem with diabolical means turn to these Pentecostal churches for succor from these humiliating problems. Sadly, a lot of these Pentecostal pastors who lack the spiritual power to deal with these mental health problems turn to ridiculous theatrics and acrobatics to hide their ineptitude. Some go as far as beating up deliverance candidates, sleeping with them, flogging them, stripping them naked and many other such dubious practices. While these dubious practices go on with these deliverance candidates, their principals are continually extorted and usually they cooperate in the hope of relief for their wards.

Another major reason why people throng to Pentecostal churches is the search for children and, at times, the search for a particular gender. It is on record in the Lower Cross River region that people have often sent their wives away because they could not give them children or because they could not give them male children. Until recently, little attention was paid to the biological causes of infertility and the biological causes of the birth of a particular gender. This was because, in African mythology and in Judeo-Christian tradition, children were a gift from God. In his memoirs titled "Memoirs of a Scribe," Elder Efiong Esang, a former Secretary to the Akwa Ibom State Government, stated in his memoirs titled "Memoirs of a Scribe," that when one of his forebears could not have male children, he consulted the Ibibio deity for wealth. The Ibibio deity for wealth is called "Ekpenyong," and he states that, subsequently, his forebear had male children. Interestingly, Elder Efiong Esang, up to the time of his death, had four boys and no girls. He made reference to this fact in his memoir to show the power of prayer in breaking ancient covenants. It is important to note that Elder Esang was a highly educated man and not one that was given to fables and superstition. This demonstrates how deeply ingrained the belief that deities can give children is in Africa, particularly in the Lower Cross River Region.

The Holy Bible also mentions that children are a gift from God. In the book of Genesis, the story of Abraham is told, where his migration from the land of Ur is vividly recounted. Abraham is a significant character in two major world religions, Christianity and Islam. It is recorded that his wife Sarah had no children because God closed her womb. God promised Abraham that he would be the father of many generations, even though he was well past his prime in age. Abraham trusted God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. That is why Abraham is always referred to as the Father of Faith. The barrenness of Sarah caused Abraham great distress, and at some point he wondered if Elieazar of Damascus would be his heir. When it seemed to him that God was silent, he heeded the voice of his wife and took Hagar, his wife's maid, as a concubine. Hagar gave birth to a male child called Ishmael, but Hagar and Ishmael were both sent away. Hagar persisted in taunting Sarah. In Judeo-Christian tradition, it is believed that Ishmael is the father of the Arab race, and some people allude to the fact that it was God's blessing because he came from the loins of Abraham that caused the Arabs to swim in oil wealth. This could be the origin of the negative culture of some men taking another wife when their wives have fertility issues.

Apart from Isaac, Abraham's son, there are a number of children in the Bible that came as a result of long-prevailing prayer. Prominent examples would include Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist. This sets an example for women and their families that when there is an issue of barrenness, the answer can be found in God. The Living Faith Church, AKA Winners Chapel, calls

its annual convention “Shiloh”, a name taken from the Bible and usually associated with Hannah’s visit to the Tabernacle to pray for Samuel. A number of Pentecostal churches have well-documented testimonies of women without wombs who gave birth to children after they were prayed for. This perhaps explains the ground swell of female members in these Pentecostal churches. Hopeless barren women are given new hope that they will be able to have children. In African mythology, there are also stories of notorious witches blocking the wombs of women or causing them to have stillborn children. The typical scenario in the Lower Cross River region is usually between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law. These accusations have been so fierce and, in some instances, have degenerated into heated exchanges. Thus, women seeking help from oppressive witches, often a mother or a mother-in-law, often run into the arms of waiting pastors in their bid to get succor and relief. It can thus be stated that the search for a solution to conception problems is a major catalyst for the wide spread and reach of Pentecostal churches.

CONCLUSION

It can thus be stated that the Pentecostal experience in the Lower Cross River Region is as a result of both Scriptural illumination and a search for freedom. The rascality, arrogance, and opulence of some pastors in the Lower Cross River region has, however, led to a gradual return to the older Orthodox churches with the conclusion that the old way is better. This is because of the ridiculous and ludicrous things often done by Pentecostal pastors in the name of God. The results of the research findings for this work indicate that the churches that tend to thrive in the Lower Cross River region are the ones that have and adopt a balanced approach in the dissemination of the word of God and in church administration. Diligent research and observation also indicate that in the lower Cross River region, no matter the signs, wonders, and miracles a ministry displays, Christians from the lower Cross River region are always on the lookout for diligence and accountability as it concerns church finances.

The desire to be as close to the Bible standard as possible has also greatly fueled the Pentecostal experience in the Lower Cross River region. Indeed, there is a church in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria that goes by the name Bible Standard. This innate desire by most believers to be as close to the scriptures as possible has been dubiously exploited by a number of Pentecostal pastors who spew out one unbalanced revelation after another from the Word of God. For instance, some encourage tricks and fraud because of the story of Esau and Jacob, while others attempt to convert people’s wives because of the story of David and Bathsheba. In the scriptures, Timothy was urged by the Apostle Paul to study to show himself approved unto God, a workman that needed not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. Some of the fallacious and ludicrous revelations from ministers of the Gospel who should know better have often encouraged Christians to return to the older traditional Orthodox churches where there is discipline and order.

The word of God states clearly that the blessing that comes from God adds no sorrow to it. This is thus the expectation of every believer seeking a blessing from God. A number of Pentecostal pastors have, however, resorted to charms, divination, magic, pranks, fraud, sorcery, and witchcraft, all in a bid to meet the expectations of their teeming members. Thus, for a number of unsuspecting church members, what initially seemed to be a blessing often turns out to be a source of torment and affliction. Members are often held captive in certain denominations against their will, and pastors are often caught in the deliberate practice of wickedness because of the authority their ecclesiastical position affords them. It can thus be concluded that the rascality, insensitivity, and thoughtlessness of a number of Pentecostal pastors in the Lower Cross River Region have led to a quelling of the Pentecostal movement. New Ministries and Proclamations of a Divine Call are frequently met with skepticism and are viewed as the work of a sleazy fraudster.

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