

## **AN EXEGETICO-HERMENEUTICAL APPRAISAL OF JOHN 12: 24-26: RESPONSE TO CHRISTIAN RELIGIOSITY IN NIGERIA**

**Chiamaka Nkemdilim Chigbo**

Department of Religion and Human Relations,  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka  
Email: cn.chigbo@unizik.edu.ng

### **Abstract**

Religiosity in contemporary Nigerian Christianity ought to bear good moral conduct. It has failed to be the true representation of Christ. This has become a dilemma proving difficult to resolve. This paper considered the practical significance of the text, John 12: 24-26 under the prism of Christian religiosity in Nigeria. Since the title is a bit too vast for the limited time of the discourse, the paper, appraised therefore religiosity and the diverse ways that Christian religiosity is expressed in Nigeria. This appraisal is done using the selected text. Synchronic method of exegesis was applied to this effect. The paper is poised to expose John's view embodied in the text, with a view to contextualize it appropriately in Nigeria. The argument of the work is that John presents vital instruction in the text that is useful in addressing the aberration of religiosity in Nigeria. The paper concludes that the diverse manifestations of Christianity religiosity are not in tune with the teachings of the religion. It recommends that the church should consciously make a turn for good and imbibe the view of the text.

Keywords: Religion, Religiosity, John 12: 24-26, Materialism, Prosperity.

### **Introduction**

The gospel of John unlike the synoptic is laden with profound theological motif. The evangelist intends to present Jesus beyond a mere historical Jewish Messiah such that the Gentiles could also easily relate to this Christ. The Gentile Johannine community is a latter development in the Christian history. Making the story of Jesus and salvation history comprehensible for them requires a delicate presentation of this. The evangelist therefore outside the style of synoptic writers deployed more theology to this history of salvation. The primary audience, the Gentiles, is faced with challenges of syncretism and the predominant Gnosticism. Relatively, in the contemporary Christianity in Nigeria, the question of the religiosity has become worrisome. Since the gospel of John could fittingly address the Gentile audience faced with similar problem in different passages, it could as well be applied to a more general theme which is religiosity.

Ekpe (2014) insists that "The phenomena of religiosity are facts of everyday life in the content of Africa" (p. 7). Religiosity in the contemporary Christianity in Nigeria has been accused of so much misdoings. The predominant religiosity has been associated with negative criticisms. The church has failed to live up to its standard and teaching. It is no longer about serving and following Christ, rather a religiosity that is self-seeking and self preserving. The religiosity in Nigeria even amongst so many Christians has been influenced by the dire economic situation in the country. There is rapid increase in the number of churches in urban and suburban cities, yet it has not succeeded in producing positive change in characters of the adherents. Shallow religiosity does not conform to the examples laid down by Christ. It has alienated the faith from day to day activities and character building. Obviously, the crime index of the country is on a steady rise despite that the people are deeply religious. The integral gap the church is supposed to fill is left void. As a body of Christ, the light ought to shine in every sense of it in the world. People are to see Christ in the lives of the believers. This is beyond the spheres of mere religious professions. While the spiritual regeneration is important, the physical moral conduct must bear witness to such internal work of salvation. The character must align with the faith.

This paper confines itself in the main to a critical study of the text with a view to utilize the import of the text to address the widespread religiosity amongst the contemporary Christians in Nigeria. The study is interpreted within context of its pericope, John 12: 20-36. With proper understanding and implementation of the study, the author believes that the result of this research will help to correct the aberration of religiosity in Nigeria. It will present a simple Christ-like model that will help to curb the

menace. This will encourage rejuvenation of authentic Christianity that will be a true conscience of the society and a tool of social and moral cohesion in Nigeria.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

**Religiosity:** Religiosity is the state of an individual's participation in religious activities. Sometimes, the religious behaviors and dispositions of the individual may suggest in a way, an aberration that is now considered an overt form of religiosity. Essentially, religious participation, belief and practices hinge upon the basic belief in a Supreme Being and man's attempt to show piety and faith in the object of belief. The concept of religiosity is understood differently by different disciplines. Holdcroft (2006) remarks that "religiosity is a complex concept and difficult to define for at least two reasons. The first is the uncertainty and imprecise nature of English language" (p. 89). That is to say, the word has many synonyms such as religiousness, piousness, holiness, orthodoxy, faith, belief and devotion. These synonyms rather than being the exact equivalent of religiosity could be its various dimensions. This scholar also agrees to the fact that the subject cuts across many disciplines. Each of these fields buttressing their own peculiarities of the subject; theology, religious education, sociology, politics, psychology and even medicine all study religiosity differently.

Pearce (2011) sees religiosity as a person's characteristic that is difficult to measure in generalities. He describes religiosity as religious participation; the belief of the individual religious adherent. As an agent of social cohesion, religiosity aids the integration of people in an increasing individuating society. On the other hand, Kurd (2018) affirms that interestingly, in the more holistic measure of political tolerance, religiosity actually has a positive and statistical significant effect on political tolerance. This position of Kurd is obviously in contrast with what is often expressed by popular opinions especially in the American academia regarding Islam and conservatism in the Arab world. He pointed out that the tenuous, generalized concept of "Islam" has been linked to a variety of outcomes, including authoritarianism and violence. The findings of Kurd insist that, "There is no link between religiosity and political participation" (Kurd, 2018: 81). Simply put, he established that there is no link between increased religiosity, negative views of democracy by different people and intolerance of others.

In the context of this work, religiosity would constrain its meaning to popular religiosity in Nigeria. Here, it refers to excessive illogical/irrational inclination to denominational dogmas and practices without critical evaluation. It refers further to empty show of religiousness or piety without an equivalent faith, morality and true commitment to God. Common to this are ignorance, fundamentalism, biased and intentional misinterpretation and as well misapplication of Bible passages to suit personal motifs. Usually, an individual that exhibits such listed traits vehemently resists orthodoxy, critical reflection and any form of intellectual arguments. Popular religiosity as a strong religious fixation affects many religious groups. However, our interest here is religiosity as regards the Christian faith as practiced by the people in Nigeria. It will be bordering on syncretism, denominationalism, and proliferation of churches, prosperity preaching, the quest for miracles and numerous extremisms of some Christian groups in Nigeria.

**Exegesis:** This literally means reading out of a text. This is an analytical method of interpretation of the Bible texts. This critical method ensures that the reader elicits the meaning of the text as intended by the text. The difference between exegesis and eisegesis is that the later reads into the text the meaning presupposed by the reader while exegesis reads out of the text the original meaning intended by the text. Gorman (2001) defines exegesis as "the careful historical, literary and theological analysis of a text" (p. 8). It is an objective reading aimed at ascertaining the import or sense of the text in a wholesome way. Exegesis involves a deliberate close reading of the text word-by-word, phrase-by-phrase and then studying all the parts of the text to understand it as a whole.

Again, it requires asking historical questions. By this, we mean the diachronic approach. Sometimes also, it considers the literary and semantics import of the text, and by this the synchronic method of exegesis is intended. Exegesis may not always reveal a new meaning outside that which is known of the text, but it is not an out of place occurrence in the exegetical method of interpretation. A puzzle or ambiguity may be discovered by a reader while studying the text. Thus, a new meaning, argument or

idea not yet discovered by others may be proposed using the exegetical method. Most suitable, this research will make use of the synchronic method. Gorman (2001) asserts that “the synchronic uses a method designed to analyze the text itself” (p. 12).

### **Christian Religiosity in Nigeria Today**

In order to understand Christianity and religiosity in Nigeria today, it is important to discuss the state of religion in Africa pre-Christianity. A common knowledge about the Africans is the renowned religiousness of the people. Their world view and cosmology depicts staunch belief in a Supreme Being, in divinities, deities, spirits and ancestors. This spiritual world view of the Africans is all encompassing and permeates the totality of the understanding of life. Mbiti (1977), Madu (2004), Ezenweke and Kanu (2012) vividly articulate such religious profile of Africa. The popular consensus amongst many of these scholars is that the African world view therefore consists of both spiritual and physical realms, despite their separate existence and differences, they continue to interact. God is a transcendental reality involved in every activity of man. If God is involved in activities therefore nothing happens to the African man without a cause. This perception and world view is not peculiar to Africans. The Jews were also known for such religion based cosmology.

This background of the African religious nature informs its attitude, practice and belief even when it came in contact with Christianity. This contact and conversion to this new religion initially left a vacuum because they could not connect their previous cosmology with this religion. Obilor (2010) posits that “scholars of Igbo religion and culture agree that there are conflicts and tensions in relation to Igbo culture and the new faith, Christianity. They also agree that the root of the problem can be traced to colonial evangelization” (p. 277). This strain in relationship between Christianity and traditional religion is not peculiar to the Igbo traditional religion. It is a general African experience. The result of this conflict and confusion was the birth of African Independent Churches.

Similarly, Falaye and Babalola (2012) assert that African Independent Churches’ emergence in the history of Christian Churches in the 19th century can be said to be largely linked with the idea of making the Bible relevant to the entire Africans. Indeed the late 19th century inaugurated the African Independent Churches and the later coming of neo-Pentecostal preachers was also a novel development. In addition to the position of Falaye and Babalola (2012), Adedibu (2018) affirms that:

The inability of European Christianity to address most of the existential realities of the Africans and the stigmatization of African Traditional Religion mainly contributed to the emergence of African Independent Churches in the 19th century in Africa. The emergence and proliferation of African Independent Churches in Africa was Africa’s response to Europeanized Christianity with its imperialistic doctrine and practices that negated expectation of its new context- Africa (p. 1).

Pentecostalism and popular piety became a theme and trend for many of such similar groups that would later evolve. Many scholars such as Achunike and Kitause (2014) and Agazue (2015) observe this move from a conservative religiosity to a more intense religiosity in Africa because of Pentecostalism. A new reality and challenge were birthed for Christianity in Nigeria because of the influx of these groups and movements. Attempts made at many quarters to combat this have not made much headway. Diara and Onah (2014) comment that, “The issue of prosperity preaching and miracles for which the mainline Churches were worried has indeed become the linchpin of the flourishing Pentecostal Churches” (p. 397). This is difficult to fight because the people felt at home with these recent Christian denominations that recognized the realities of the African world and spoke in the language the people have so much yearned for. Nigeria’s Christian religious experience had since been severely influenced by economic, political and spiritual considerations. The understanding of the people had since been shaped by these various realities; the result is a gradual erosion of the core Christian teaching. To this end, many scholars have decried this situation. The much professed religiosity of the Nigerian Christians sadly does not match commensurate moral qualities for relationship with others in the society. It is an embarrassing contradiction that a people with such high religious ethical standards could still be so corrupt and notorious for illegal and nefarious activities. Nwankwo (2015) opines that:

Thus, from all outward indications, Nigerians and indeed Africans are a chronically religious people. There is no other nation in the modern world with much religiosity as contemporary Nigeria. However, the problem is that, with all this show of religiosity or outward display of piety, one would have expected to see a very high degree of social morality in Nigeria. This is because all world religions generally promote truth, justice, honesty and probity, but this is not the case with Nigeria. (p. 10).

It is not surprising to see that within such a religious consciousness, is the geometrical rise of Pastors, bishops, evangelists, faith healers, prophets and 'visioners' to fill the gap and satisfy the spiritual yearning of the people. Agazue (2015) in a bid to demonstrate the revolution of religiosity in Nigeria acknowledges the opinion of earlier scholars who maintain that the main stream churches are losing their members to the Pentecostal Churches. He asserts further that "even the conservative Pentecostal churches have started losing their own members to their religio-commercial counter parts" (p. 14). Obviously, there is a new sheriff in town that effortlessly captures the attention of many. Agazue (2015) emphatically points to the numerous culture of superstition in Nigeria and the African spiritual world that ultimately cumulates to the multiplication of religio-commercial pastors in Nigeria. Miracles are presented as the only way out of these many problems of man.

Clearly, the question of the existence of a different religiosity amongst the Nigerian Christians cannot be denied. This trend today affects even the pioneer mission churches. The emergence of various charismatic groups is a response by them to curb this drift to new religious movements. Religiosity here must therefore be studied not only in sociology and psychology of religion but in biblical scholarship and theology.

### **Different Manifestations of Religiosity in Nigeria**

**Syncretism:** Syncretism basically presents two or more parallel alternatives of religion simultaneously. The individual is caught in between the two ends and often would not wish to part with either. In syncretism, at least one of the two opposite religious systems loses its basic function, place and identity (Kanu, 2012). For the Christian thought, this involves mixing or worshipping God and then partly also aligned with another religion's object of worship. Critical here is the point that the core elements of the gospel are substituted with the constituents of the parallel religion. The worship of the true God and other deity or deities is combined to actualize spiritual fulfillment. Boff (1985) understands syncretism in six different ways, namely: syncretism as addition, syncretism as accommodation, syncretism as mixture, syncretism as agreement, syncretism as translation and syncretism as adaptation. The Christian scriptures greatly frowns at this and judges such as sinful. In many occasions, both the Old Testament and New Testament rebuked believers for worshipping two gods. Syncretism is quite different from inculturation. While the former wants serve parallel divine beings at the same time, the later seeks to understand Christ in an African way.

It is not unaccustomed to discover that many Nigerian Christians are yet to give in fully either to the traditional religion or Christianity. Most probably, this is because many do not find Christianity as totally fulfilling, active and close to their realities. The African world is indeed a spiritual one. Every major event is remarkable and nothing is considered ordinary. Giving the fore going, it is no surprise to see the struggle by many to stick to different alternatives of religion simultaneously. This deep seated aversion to syncretism may not easily be curbed because of the perceived advantages from both sides. This contradiction of religion, especially between African Traditional religion and Christianity has burdened many Christians and scholars alike. Muonwe (2011) observed that "There is a sudden surge of syncretic independent churches all over the continent of Africa in recent times" (p. 13). Unsavory as it is, syncretism continues to wax in Nigeria despite the many accomplishments towards inculturation. Presumably, the brazen superstitious beliefs and culture in Africa makes it difficult to combat syncretism. The religiosity of many in Nigeria is built within the ambient of syncretism. They see nothing wrong in belonging to many prayer ministries and sects in order to solve their problems. Such disposition encourages proliferation of churches.

**Proliferation of Churches:** This is another significant way that religiosity is rapidly expressed in the country. One would have thought that the dozens of these groups and countless denominations would be enough to propagate Christianity in Africa. Sadly, this is not the case, as continuously they continue to divide further into smaller groups. Some of these groups usually start in the house of the founder while other rent warehouses with three or four persons. They however tend to grow exponentially within few years. Observably, many of their members do not last because their miracles are not forth coming again so their members migrate to another similar group. This assurance that such populace regularly convert to a different group encourage the charismatic ones to start up their own churches. The church business or industry is massively selling in Nigeria. The clients and consumers of their products and services are unlimited. Clearly, the search for quick glory in the face of oppressive and backward system gives room for such development. Out of unemployment and greed, many turned to the Church industry as pastors, general overseers and bishops. Noticeably, they prefer being the founder of the ministry no matter how small than serving under scrutiny and financial constrains. The intensity of this proliferation is an evidence of lack of depth and symptom of an ailing religious life. Superficial religiosity prospers adequately in proximity of such splinter Christian groups.

**Religious Fundamentalism:** Religious fundamentalism, bigotry, intolerance and antagonism have endangered Christianity in Nigeria. Ignorant and inciting preaching that fuels disunity is popular amongst many of its groups. With fundamentalism here, each group wants to present theirs as better. They usually see other groups as not authentic in doctrine and faith. Obielosi (2013) berating disunity in Christendom argued that “possibility of realizing and gathering all believers is still remote. More divisions are rather witnessed daily with every sect claiming autonomy to the truth” (p. 145). Various groups and sects lay claim to true knowledge of God and regard others who differ as not Christians enough. Fundamentalism breeds intolerance and this have wrecked havoc in many families and communities. Sometimes, even within the same denomination, the evangelists and charismatic ones see themselves as more religious than others. The popular parlance and categories of Christians in many of these Nigerian religious movements are “unbelievers” and “born agains”. They are used especially to describe the sinners (those who not given their lives to Christ) and the born again, those who accepted Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. The date and event preceding this new birth is memorable. This air and flair of superiority is a grave danger to the faith. For many Christians, fundamentalism is synonymous to being like Christ. This is a cankerworm that has spread to many new religious sects in Nigeria. This has contributed generously to elitism, nepotism and favouritism on the basis of religious affiliation. One would think that this is because of ignorance, unfortunately many intellectuals and educated folks are as well caught up in this web. Ironically, religiosity in Nigeria over time has taken shape using this format.

**Prosperity Theology:** In a climate of hunger and continent of poverty, prosperity proffers succor and hope for better tomorrow. A material God is appropriately designed to attend to numerous economic challenges. The prosperity also turns to prospering in health. It represents Christianity as reshaped, indeed recomposed, by the culture of consumerism and neo liberalism (Nwankwo, 2019). A wealth and health insurance from the religion is most desirable. 3<sup>rd</sup> John 1:2 describes the centrality of the thought; to prosper and be in good health even as their soul prospers. In many sects, the God of prosperity is lauded and is expected to give bountiful harvests once the members sow their seed. If and when He is yet to provide, the members are to continue sowing till their answers come. Subsequent to Benson Idahosa’s ministry, it was not so prosaic to see preachers emphasizing prosperity in Nigeria. Christianity is not a fast route to affluence and wealth, however when unfounded message of prosperity over rides the salvation brought by Christ then there is a cause for alarm truly. The unfiltered way it projects quick wealth distorts the true representation of the Christian faith. Achunike (2004) pointed that some priests from the Catholic Church are influenced sadly by Pentecostalism. It would not be an over statement to say that some mainline priests are subtly embracing prosperity theology. Some subtly, others overtly, the overwhelming luxury and wealth displayed by some exemplary prosperity preachers may have a hand in this evolution.

**Misinterpretation and Misrepresentation of the Bible:** Wholesome interpretation of the Bible requires the understanding the unity of the various books, they are not independent. Correct interpretation of the scriptures is achieved with the guide of the Holy Spirit, as well as through the acquired knowledge of Bible history and criticism. Biblical criticism is an essential tool that helps to clear, sharpen and balance one's thought process in interpretation of the Bible. Misinterpretation and misrepresentation of Bible could be intentional and other times unintentionally done. Unintentionally, inadequate training and ignorance contribute to this mistake. Mostly this is committed by some of the overzealous laity. Outside this, many for their selfish reasons prefer to misconstrue some passages to suit their narratives. Tithing and seed sowing has become Nigerian Pastors' favourite subject. The passages that dealt with the subject are taken out of context and often over-flogged to ensure continuous flow of money for them. In many sects, grace, prosperity, speaking in tongue, prophecy, miracle and exorcism has been abused. Obielosi (2016) mentions that "The generality of Christians are mostly vulnerable to this as they fall victim to sweet tongued preachers who quote the Bible even out of context to get what they want" (p. 2). They unwittingly preach grace as opposed to true Christian living and imaginatively describe it as corresponding to the members' seed or giving power. Similarly, in many of these new generation movements, exorcism, spiritual forces and spirit possession are the latest bargaining chips.

**Preposterous Dressing and Life Style:** Dressing and unique life styles are strong identifiers of culture. Since the escalation of religiosity and propensity to overt religiousness, choice of dressing and life style are recently considered strong indicators of one's religious background. Thus, outside the sphere of culture, religion and in this case Christianity, religious beliefs could determine or prescribe a dress code and affect the lifestyle choices of many. In the conservative quarters, many fashion items and wears are considered sinful and demonic. Justifiable or not, one could appropriately label the strand of Pentecostal group of any individual who belongs to this Pentecostal groups because of their dispositions to life. The stupendous way this issue, especially dressing, continues to affect inter and intra religious relationships in Nigeria is overwhelming. More so, for the faith healing group, staunch beliefs against modern medicine, blood transfusion is important. They propagate total dependence on faith healing. This is upheld by many of them even when human life is at stake. Some church-owned clothes, uniforms, medals, invitation tags, emblems, pin ups, aprons, head gears, bracelets and other religious items are made part of regular wears. They are worn as charms and hamlets for protections from numerous forces. On the other hand, liberal dressing and life style are common with the prosperity groups. Their dress culture is mostly corporate; the youth are always in tune with fashionable styles. They are always razz and trendy to fit their prosperity God narrative.

### **Exegesis of John 12: 24-26**

The Greek Text-Nestle Aland reads:

<sup>24</sup> avmh.n avmh.n le,gw u`mi/n( eva.n mh. o` ko,kkoj tou/ si,tou pesw.n eivj th.n gh/n avpoqa,nh|( auvto.j mo,noj me,nei\ eva.n de. avpoqa,nh|( polu.n karpo.n fe,rei. <sup>25</sup> o` filw/n th.n yuch.n auvtou/ avpollu,ei auvth,n( kai. o` misw/n th.n yuch.n auvtou/ evn tw/| ko,smw| tou,tw| eivj zwh.n aivw,nion fula,xei auvth,n. <sup>26</sup> eva.n evmoi, tij diakonh/|( evmoi. avkolouqe,i,tw( kai. o[pou eivmi. evgw. evkei/ kai. o` dia,konoj o` evmo.j e;stai\ eva,n tij evmoi. diakonh/| timh,sei auvto.n o` path,r

The text (John 12: 24-26) when compared with other variants reveals some textual difficulties. The most prominent will be looked at subsequently here.

In v. 25, avpollu,ei has an alternative reading avpolesei in A D Q f<sup>(1.13)</sup> lat co. the alternative avpolesei is a future indicative of the verb. Majority of the MSS such as 1<sup>66.75</sup> a B L W Y 33. l 2211 pc aur ff<sup>2</sup> have avpollu,ei as seen in our text. Obielosi (2014) comments that the present indicative verb refers "to the action as continued and non terminated when viewed wholly" (p. 25). The alternative to word (avpolesei) as provided above views the action as that which is to happen in the future, the future indicative will make the text easier to read. However, the choice of present indicative makes the reading of the text difficult. On the ground of the evidence shown from the above textual criticism, we take it to be that most probably our text is closer to the original manuscript.

Verse 26 has many textual problems. *evmoi*, *tij diakonh* used in our text is witnessed in  $\hat{\iota}^{66.75}$  a A B K L W Y 0250. (579). 892. 1241. 1424. *l* 844. *l* 2211 al. A transposition of these words are found in some documents such as *l* 3 2  $\hat{\Upsilon}$ . Another group of variant is seen in 3 1 D Q  $f^{13}$  33. 565 al. *Eivmi*. *evgw*. Still in v. 26 has a transposition as used in  $\hat{\iota}^{66}$  D W *pc*. Multiple attestation in older manuscripts points to a submission that the variant here is probably closer to the original. *eva,n* in the last part of verse 26 has an alternative reading (*eva,n de*) as seen in  $\hat{\iota}^{66c}$  579 *pc*. *ka,i eva,n* is also an alternative of the word seen in some MSS such as A 0250  $\hat{\Upsilon}$  *f sy<sup>ch</sup>*. The variation of the reading in our text is witnessed in  $\hat{\iota}^{66*}$  P<sup>75</sup>A B L W a Q Y  $f^{13}$  33. 565. 892. 1241. *l* 844<sup>pt</sup>. *l* 2211al *lat sy<sup>p</sup>*. In some MSS, namely,  $\hat{\iota}^{66}$  Q 700<sup>c</sup> *pc* *lat* there is an insertion of *mou* to the word *path,r* also in the last part of the sentence. In other MSS such as  $f^{13}$  *pc* *vg<sup>ms</sup>* *mou o` evn toij ouv ranoj* was added by these readings.

### Working Translation of the Text (John 12: 24-26)

24. Truly Truly I say to you, if not the grain of the wheat falls down into the earth to (and) dies. It remains itself alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.

25. He that loves his life loses it, and he (who) hates his life in this world he will guard it into life eternal himself.

26. If anyone serves me, he must follow me, and where I am, and there my servant will also be. If anyone serves me the father will honour him.

### Analysis of the Syntax

John 12: 24-26 is rich in styles and semantic of words. Interpreting the text properly requires that words used need to be clearly explained and understood properly in the context where they appear. Briefly, the verbs of both the main and subordinate clauses are commented upon individually. This is to enable the readers understand the text and subsequent analysis. Phrases, clauses and sentences are given detailed clarification when necessary. The linguistics analysis here starts from v. 24 down to v. 26.

v. 24 subordinate clause: *avmh.n avmh.n le,gw u`mi/n*

Parsing/comment: *le,gw* present indicative active voice 1<sup>st</sup> person singular from the root *legw*. This verb of speech has an aspect of continuity especially when it is viewed as a whole.

Subordinate clause: *eva.n mh. o` ko,kkoj tou/ si,tou pesw.n eivj th.n gh/n avpoqa,nh*

Parsing/comment: *pesw.n*, this is an aorist verb participle, active voice from the root word *piptw*. Here, it indicates the circumstances which an action takes place. By aorist here, the verb participle has been performed once and has been terminated. The verb expresses a movement of descent from a place of elevation.

*Avpoqa,nh* is an aorist subjunctive 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular active voice from the root word *avpoqnhskw*. The verb expresses a state of violence. Here the individual ceases to exist.

Main clause: *aavto.j mo,noj me,nei*

Parsing/comment: *me,nei*, is a present indicative verb active voice 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular from the root word *me,nw*. The verb expresses the static state of a being.

Subordinate clause: *eva.n de. avpoqa,nh*

Parsing/comment: *Avpoqa,nh* is an aorist subjunctive 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular active voice from the root word *avpoqnhskw*. The verb expresses a state of violence. Here the individual ceases to exist. The verb *avpoqa,nh* was used same in the first sentence of the verse.

Main clause: *polu.n karmo.n fe,rei*

Parsing/comment: *fe,rei*, this is a present indicative active voice 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular of the verb *fe,rw*.. The verb expresses reproduction or productivity.

The entire verse carries a conditional implication for the possible result or outcome of the action initiated already in the sentence.

v. 25

Main clause: *o` filw/n th.n yuch.n aavtou*

Parsing/comment: *filw/n*, this is a present verb participle active voice nominative singular. The verb participle, the being verb (loving) is put in the present form because like an adjective it tells us more about the subject.

*yuch.n*, this is a noun accusative feminine singular from the word *yuch*. meaning soul or life. The choice of *yuch.n* here is used to refer to the metaphysical life usually suitable when speaking about human beings.

Main clause: avpollu,ei auvth,n

avpollu,ei, a present indicative verb active voice 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular from the word avpollumi. The verb presupposes a violent act of destruction.

Subordinate clause: kai. o` misw/n th.n yuch.n auvtou/ evn tw/| ko,smw| tou,tw| eivj

Parsing/comment: misw/n, this is a present verb participle active voice nominative singular from the word misew. This participle adequately corresponds with filw/n in the first subordinate clause in the sentence.

Main clause: zwh.n aivw,nion fula,xei auvth,n

fula,xei, this is a future indicative verb active voice 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular from the word fulassw. It expresses a sense of defense.

v. 26 Subordinate clause: eva.n evmoi, tij diakonh/

Diakonh, this is present subjunctive verb active voice 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular from the verb diakonew. The verb expresses a sense of purpose or duty intended in the sentence. The reason for the protasis/main clause is given in this subordinate clause.

Main clause: evmoi. avkolouqei,tw

Avkolouqei,tw- This is a present imperative verb active voice of the avkolouqew. The verb could express either a sense of direction or obedience. In this case both meaning would fit in to the life of ministry as explained in the text.

Subordinate clause: kai. o[pou eivmi. evgw.

Eivmi- this is a present indicative verb active voice person singular from the root word eivmi..

Main clause: evkei/ kai. o` dia,konoj o` evmo.j e;stai

Parsing/comment: e;stai- Future indicative verb middle deponent voice 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular from the verb eivmi. As a middle voice, the subject (servant) is the agent and at the same person (s) experiencing the verbal action. Using e;stai here the reflexive quality of the verb is expressed in the future sense.

Subordinate clause: eva,n tij evmoi. diakonh/| timh,sei auvto.n o` path,r

timh,sei- Future indicative active voice 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular of the verb timaw.

### A Look at the Text

24-26: These verses used metaphoric short sayings to buttress the importance of the death of Christ and also the cost of the life of ministry. This takes a similar synoptic method for short sayings. The metaphor began with a familiar introduction formula for short sayings- avmh.n avmh.n le,gw u` mi/n (verily, verily I say to you). Benard (1953) notes that this formula is used to introduce a saying of special solemnity. Life, salvation of humanity and glorification were to come through this imminent death. Just like the grain of wheat cannot bear much fruit except it falls to the earth and die. The crux of the paradox is that life comes through death. Paul outside the Johannine corpus was also conversant with this unique theological rationale. Thus both Johannine and Pauline theologies share similar attributes in discussing the effect of Christ's death.

Proceeding to verse 25, there is an in depth meaning of the futility of the worldly life. The saying points to the value of sacrificial aspect of the Christian life. It is required of every true believer, to abandon the quest for earthly things for the more important eternal life. Some passages in the synoptic gospels express such view Mk. 8: 35; Lk. 9: 25, 14:26; Matt. 10: 39). The vicarious sacrifice of Christ must be imitated; however, this does not mean initiating willful death by the believers. All earthly possessions or quest must be readily given up on especially when they contradict the Christian message. Guarding life does not in any way imply that it is the sole work of the man to achieve eternal life on one's own. One would further observe that the writer choose yuch.n above zwh, while both words mean life, yuch.n (psuche) on the other hand is the conscious organ of feeling and desire, however it may not suitably denote the sense of the divine as pneuma and zwh does. Zwh most appropriately refers to eternal life and not the physical life.

The life of ministry is expounded in v. 26. It further continues to explain even more the paradox already started in v.25. This is to say, that anyone who serves Jesus must follow him. It is the non-negotiable requirement for an acceptable service. It is hinged on following the examples given by the master himself. The value/honour of a diakonaj (servant) lies on obeying this command, it is a committed service. It is worthy to note that discipleship as a theme occupies a significant place in the gospels and



in many of these passages, the word disciple refers to one who follows Jesus. These disciples are mandated to leave all and follow Jesus (Mk. 10: 28; Lk. 5: 11). Following Jesus also demands the individual to partake in the cross experience and salvation history. This implies cross bearing, breaking ties with anything that could stop one from serving; be it love for self, family and worldly desires.

It is important to mention here that the origin of this pericope indicates that certain Gentiles were looking for Jesus. Jesus proceeded to respond to them and hence the passage. The text, John 12:24-26 has an inclusive meaning. As much as the ‘servants’ Jesus referred to in the context would urge one to categorize the text as talking about life of ministry, however, this is not to be taken generally as so. Anyone who is to serve him (disciple) refers not only to the selected number of persons who were called by Jesus nor does it strictly refer to those who hold leadership positions in the religious circles. The servant therefore includes all believers who have decision to follow Christ. It is this decision that makes one a Christian.

Apparently, the meaning and message of the text is alien in many Christian quarters in Nigeria. Many abhor suffering and life without luxuries. The overt attachment to worldly possession is in wide circulation in Nigeria, even among the Christians. These days, inordinate need for wealth has taken over the place of the cross and true Christian living. This popular religiosity gets farther away from the truth of the message of salvation in Christ and soul winning. Religiosity should be an avenue to show the world (others) the light, the content of our faith and belief. Obijiaku (2014) is of the belief that “The quest for money, power and glory has been the bane of many a religious leader, and is the cause of the many deceits in popular but false religiosity” (p. 51). True religiosity would require total rejection of the self and other worldly distractions. It is neither a business idea for monetary gains nor a camouflage to perpetuate evil and promote selfish interests of preachers and followers. If Christianity in its present state in Nigeria must get back effectively as a torch bearer of Christ’s message of salvation and love, then it must do away with negative forms of religiosity. It must take the integral message of John 12: 24-26 seriously. Following Christ truly must supersede every other concern. Glorification and indeed glory in all forms of it is gotten only through following the standard of Christ. A christocentric approach to the faith is a recourse that must be made, if the Church is to regain its position as the conscience of the society.

### **Evaluation and Conclusion**

This research is of the opinion that the trends of the popular religiosity in contemporary Christianity today is contradictory to the true message of Christ. The position of this paper is that the instruction of the author of the Fourth Gospel is useful in solving the issue of diverse forms of popular religiosity. This is because it calls back the attention of the followers of Jesus to the value of the true identity, attribute and reward of the Christian life. The research observed that there has been a shift in religiosity amongst Christians in Nigeria and this brought harsh criticism generally to the Church. Such religiosity robs the church of its essential roles in the society, as the conscience of the society and tool of social cohesion. It is therefore imperative for believers to reflect the above message in their lives and character. Combating the prevalent streams of popular religiosity in Nigeria is an urgent call and this is better done from the stand point of theological reflection. The teaching of the evangelist in the above text will reprove appropriately such religiosity and its many manifestations in Nigeria.

### **References**

- Adedibu, B.A. (2018). The changing faces of African independent churches as development actors across the borders. *Theological Studies*, 74, 1, 116-122.
- Achunike, H.C. (2004). *The influence of Pentecostalism on Catholic priests and seminarians in Nigeria*. Onitsha: Africana.
- Achunike, H.C. & Kitause, R.H. (2014). Pentecostal theology and ethics in the Nigerian society. In L.E. Ijezie, S. Audu & A.I. Acha (Eds.). *Religious faith and public service in Nigeria: Ambiguities and paradoxes* (pp.208-217). Port Harcourt: CATHAN.
- Agazue, C. (2015). *The role of a culture of superstition in the proliferation of religio- commercial pastors in Nigeria*. USA: Author house.

- Benard, J.H. (1953). *A critical and exegetical commentary on the gospel according to St John*. Edinburgh: T&T, Clark.
- Boff, L. (1985). *Church: Charism and power: Liberation theology and the institutional church*. New York: Crossroads.
- Diara, B.C.D. & Onah, N.G. (2014). The phenomenal growth of Pentecostalism in the contemporary Nigeria society: A challenge to mainline churches. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Science* 5, 6, 395-402.
- Ekpe, A. P. (2014). Rethinking religiosity in Africa within a normative and explanatory framework of the theory of knowledge. *Abuja Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, 4, 3-17.
- Ezenweke, E.O. & Kanu, I. A. (2012). *Issues in Africa Traditional Religion and Philosophy*. Jos: Augustinan.
- Falaye, T.A. & Babalola, J.A.O. (2012). The relevance of African Independent Churches to the Yoruba of South-Western Nigeria. In M.O. Akpa, R. Aderanti, A. Adesegun, A. Adeoye, A.S.K. Abifarin (Eds.). *Contemporary Humanities* (pp. 45-61). University: Babcock.
- Gorman, M.J. (2001). *Elements of biblical exegesis: A basic guide for students and ministers*. Massachusetts: Hendrickson.
- Holdcroft, B. (2006). What is religiosity? *Catholic Education Journal of inquiry and practice*, 10, 1, 89-103.
- Kurd, D.E. (2018). Religiosity and its political effects. *Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies*, 1, 2, 81 - 89.
- Madu, J.E. (2004). *Honest to African cultural heritage*. Onitsha: Coskan.
- Mbiti, J.S. (1977). *African religions and philosophy*. London: Heinemann.
- Muonwe, M. (2011). The challenges of religious syncretism to African Christianity: The role of the church. *Journal of Inculturation Theology*, 12, 1&2, 3-20.
- Nwankwo, S.C. (2015). Religious boom and moral decadence in Nigeria: Implications for national development. *International Journal of Theology and Reformed tradition*, 7, 9-25.
- Nwankwo, L.N. (2019). African Christianity & the challenge of prosperity gospel. *Ministerium Journal of Contextual Theology*, 5, 11-28.
- Obielosi, D.C. (2013). John 12, 20-22 as a missionary text. An exegetical study in the light of Isaiah 423 and Isaiah 5215 LXX. *Journal of Religion and Human Relations*, 1, 5, 45-62.
- Obielosi, D.C. (2016). Inspiration and inerrancy of the bible: An exegetical interpretation of 1Tim 3, 16. *Journal of Religion and Human Relations*, 8, 1, 1-19.
- Obilor, J.I. (2010). *Many religions, one God*. Owerri: Matt Books.
- Obijiaku, C. (2014). Jesus condemns hypocritical religiosity (Matthew 23: 1-12): lesson for Nigerian religious leaders. *Abuja Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, 4, 37-51.
- Pearce, L.D. (2011). *A faith of their own: stability and change in the religiosity of American's adolescence*. Oxford: University.