

# WEALTH AND PROSPERITY GOSPEL: CHALLENGES TO CHRISTIANITY IN IGBOLAND

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## Abstract

The research work ventured into the impacts of Christianity in Igboland. Following the way and manner Christianity is being practiced after the many years of Christians' presence in Igboland, it has left one to wonder whether the said Christian religion has firmly been rooted in the hearts of the people. It is an obvious fact that the major achievements of Christianity in Igboland since its inception in are the unbridled proliferations of churches, inter-denominational migration and insatiable quest for prosperity amongst some Christians. The incessant rise in churches especially the group known as "Pentecostals" have instead of promoting the good moral values have rather increased jealousy, unhealthy competitions, wickedness, and other social vices due to an excessive desire for wealth and materialism. Of late, the issue of wealth and prosperity has become almost synonymous with Christian religious practice as if that is the only rewards for devout religious observance. These are the reasons why the researcher thinks there is a need to x-ray and analyze the impacts of Christianity in Igboland so as to address some issues that does not portray the church in a lime light. Specifically, the research work examined the impact of prosperity gospel in promoting a high desire for wealth and materialism. The findings of this research discovered that a lot of evil and atrocities are committed in the name of prosperity and get-wealth-quick syndrome. Generally, in the contemporary Nigerian Pentecostalism, there are rampart corruption, diabolism, and moral decadence in the name of invoking wealth for the followers. The core objective of this study is therefore to examine the Christian religious activities in Igboland especially the group known and addressed as the Pentecostal churches. The method of approach is historical and descriptive nature method of research with the primary and secondary sources of data collection.

**Keywords:** Igbo, Christianity, Gospel, Prosperity.

## 1. Introduction

It must be stated from the outset that Christians' presence in Igboland was not only concerned with the propagation of the gospel, they equally focused on materialism with their Bible and Plough policy promulgated by Thomas Fowell and Henry Venn respectively. It must also be pointed out that the upsurge of the missionary activities in its early period in Igboland laid the foundation for the high quest for wealth in today's church especially amongst the Pentecostal circle. The malicious pursuit for wealth and its attendant challenges experienced mainly in the Pentecostal faith may have been occasioned by many factors, one of which being the caption, "For Glory, Gold and God" (Nmah, 2017). Aside from the propagation of the gospel, the scramble was also for gold and markets- a quest intensified by the industrial revolution and supported by the mixed mercantilist and free-trade theories. This formed a very strong strategy adopted to facilitate conversion. Thus, anti-slavers jostled with the proponents of legitimate trade in advocating a Bible and Plough Programme (Gallagher,1958).

Evangelicals like members of the Clapham Sect, and spiritual pietists in Western Europe shared the same goal as the black Back-to-Africa Movement in the USA. While some were obeying the great command to go into all the world, baptizing and making disciples before the eschaton, others wanted to recreate the lost African glory. It is easily assumed that obedience to the great command to go into all the earth, making disciples and baptizing was the great invitation for the enterprise (Nmah,2017).

Apparently, the 3Cs strategy of Christianity, Commerce, and Civilization adopted by the early missionaries helped to expand the frontiers of Christianity in Igboland and Nigeria in general no doubt, but its ugly consequences are glaringly staring at us today. It was patterned in a way that those who embraced Christianity was invariably based on monetary and material tendencies. To Okeke(2006), Thomas Buxton's advocating that the missionaries should take the plough and the Bible into the interior while they preach the gospel was misunderstood to mean that the church is an ultimate provider of wealth. According to Idowu(1968), Africa had known the Europeans as people with immense power, wisdom, and wealth. In commercial wares brought by the Europeans, in their bearing and comportment, there was every sign of wealth, and this wealth Africans were already having a taste in the gifts brought by the European explorers. In that way, Africans followed Christianity so as to earn their livelihood and other material benefits.

Today, the adoption of commercial strategies in winning converts has taken a different turn by a group known as Pentecostal churches which belong to the African Christian Churches or New Religious Movements. There are three brands of African Christian Identities in Nigeria as given by Nmah(2004) and they include:

- Long established African-initiated and Charismatic- influenced churches such as those linked to William Wade Harris or Garrick Braide in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Classical Pentecostals of Western origin which have been operating in Africa since 1907 when the first Afro-American Pentecostal missionaries arrived in West Africa from the USA.
- New Pentecostal and Charismatic churches which become widespread phenomena since the 1970s

The concern of this study is generally on all brands of Pentecostalism in the south-eastern Nigeria, but for specificity, the study will focus more on the New Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches which became widespread since the 1970s. However, the Traditional African Initiated Churches (AICs) and classical Pentecostals are clearly differentiated as a rule have no organizational links.

Moreover, the objectives of this study include:

- To investigate whether the patterns of the early missionary expansion strategy contributed to the present day Pentecostals malpractices.

- To examine the basis of prosperity theology so as to determine both its positive and negative influences in the Nigerian and Igbo Christianity.
- To determine steps to curb the wanton quest for materialism in Igbo Christianity so as to control the rate of Christians inter-denominational migration that usually occurs from the main-line churches to the Pentecostal faith.
- To explore ways of balancing the prosperity theology so as to take care of its negative challenges to the development of Igbo Christianity.

Consequently, the significance of this study basically stems from the fact that it addresses the issues that have long threatened the collective existence of Christianity in Igboland which is the excessive pursuit for wealth and materialism. It focuses on how the Pentecostal churches in Igboland have adopted that as a strong strategy to drawing the members of the main line churches. Also, the study will produce a resource material which the future researchers especially church historians can consult to gain useful information on the issues that borders on Nigerian Pentecostalism and inter-church migrations.

The research employed the use of primary and secondary sources to obtain data. The primary source involved personal views and observation while the secondary source entail books, journals, and other literary materials. This furnished the researcher with the basic information that was necessary for the comprehension, understanding, and the analysis of the relevant issues discussed in this work. The research is also based on the deconstruction theory which entails an objective reconstruction of the contemporary Christian/Pentecostal understanding of wealth and materialism in Nigeria. Deconstruction theory propounded by George Simmel and Lewis Coser's respectively which was adopted in this work envisaged that perhaps if there is an abuse of wealth and materialism in Nigerian/Igbo Pentecostalism, the foundational cause of the problem lies in the influence of the alluring strategies used by the early missionaries to win convert. These alluring strategies with its materialistic tendencies laid the foundation of placing wealth above spirituality as experienced in the contemporary Nigerian/Igbo Christianity.

However, this study applied the George Simmel and Lewis Coser's approach which they described as "methodological relativism" to address the challenges occasioned by the unbridled quest for wealth amongst the Nigerian/Igbo Pentecostalism. One of its major challenges being the inter-denominational migration experienced in the south-east of Nigeria. This have often led to misunderstandings and conflicts amongst the various churches in Igboland. For Lewis Coser (1956), such conflict can not only generate chaos and disintegrations, it can also generate tensions and stimulates unfaithfulness in economic control and management.

From the researcher's personal findings and observations, it was discovered that the uncontrolled quest for wealth through the unfurling banner of materialism is the major reason why many people would want to own their private churches today. This is also why there are guiles everywhere, wizardry and high-ranking hypocrisy, window-dressing, favoritism, clan-spirit, sabotage, cold war, indoor fighting has besieged the

church of God. There is sheep stealing by many churches who prey upon other older churches. All these are exulted by the pursuit of money amongst the Igbo Christians. It inspired and supported the idea of using church as a lucrative means of making money. Most of today's Christians have embraced Christianity mainly for monetary and economic purposes. Kalu (1980) argued that the practice started from the era of the missionaries being that the idea of the Bible and Plough approach which was promulgated by the early missionaries interfered in the spiritual formation of the African people. In the Eastern Nigeria for example, the British missionaries apparently went as far as guaranteeing the economic provisions to the early converts. In some other places, there were stiff competitions and monopoly in the provision of some social amenities (p.45).

## **2. Christianity to Igboland**

The history of Christianity in Igboland is traced back to the Niger Expedition of 1841. It was not only a holy cause which earned the exertions of Queen Victoria and her government, but also the first step toward a general forward policy in West Africa, reversing the established doctrine of minimum commitment(Isichei,1971). When Prince Albert christened the project as chairman of the meeting that set the expedition on foot, he revealed his trust on the expedition by exerting that the cause is a holy one. According to Clarke (1982), he insisted that in spite of the fact that there were disaster, hardships and frustrations in the course of the expedition, the year 1841 was very remarkable because it was in that year that the first agreement of guaranteeing freedom of worship was signed with an Igbo Chief, Obi Ossai of Aboh on one hand and H.D. Trotter, William Allen, Bird Allen, and W. Cook, commissioners, representing Her Majesty's Government. Furthermore, Isichei (1971) went further to report the paragraph six of the treaty of Her Majesty the Queen which reads:

Christians of whatever nation or country, peaceably conducting themselves in the dominions of the chief of Aboh, shall be left in the free enjoyment and exercise of the Christian religion, and shall not be hindered or molested in their endeavours to teach the same to all persons whatever willing and desirous to be taught; nor shall any subject of Abboh who may embrace the Christian faith, be on that account, or on account of the teaching or exercise thereof, molested or troubled in any manner whatsoever.(p.311).

The signing of the treaty was considered a phenomenal achievement and merited a blessing of the almighty God. The innovation by the chaplain, Theodore Muller, was regarded by the Obi as a charm by incantation which was countered by his juju priest who ran into the cabin of the Albert with a protective charm that he placed between the king's feet (Clarke,1982). The point however is that at the beginning of the colonial rule, commerce, and mission dominated the scene and gave the impression of being shareholders in a gigantic corporation, until 1879, when both worked hand in hand in intermingling religion with commerce. Rev. Samuel Ajayi Crowther, Writing on May 12, 1857, to the Rev. H. Venn the (C.M.S) Secretary as reported by Okeke

(2006), Rev. Samuel Ajayi Crowther said, “I hope to make a judicious beginning in forming missionary stations near each trading settlement. The arrangement with trading settlements on the river will no doubt be very advantageous at the beginning as regards to financial affairs”(p.3). The joint action was more apparent in Dr. W.B. Baikies development plan presented to Venn thus; “The present plan-he-stated-is, if the state of the country permits it, to leave Mr. Taylor and Simon Jonas (native agents) in the Igbo country at a place on the left bank named Onitsha, where we wish to found a trading station, intended if possible to be of a permanent nature”(p.4). In an earlier letter to the Rev. Venn of the Mission House London, the Rev. Crowther had reported the great interest of the Igbo on the Island of Fernando Po in the prospect of beginning a mission in their own country; “Many a heart-read part of the letter-burns to see the day when the Gospel of liberty to the captives of Satan shall be proclaimed to the natives on the banks of the Niger”(p.5). This interest reinforced the choice of Onitsha site and the stationing of J.C Taylor and Simon Jonas.

In the letter of September 29, 1857, to the secretary of the C.M.S. reported by Okediadi (2010) expressed Dr. Baikie’s choice of Onitsha site with Rev. Crowther because of its strategic location as an entry to the whole of Igbo. Indeed this letter supported an earlier one written by Crowther to the secretary in which he stated that a trading factory had been established at Onitsha near the water side, and a site had been selected for the mission station in suburb of the town about one and half mile from the factory. In another letter on May 20, 1858, presented by Ekeyi (1996) in which Baikie wrote to Macgregor Laird of the flourishing trade activities at Onitsha, as well as of the mission operations; “The church agent, Mr. Taylor, was on excellent terms with the people within a fifteen mile radius”(p.2). Taylor had began his work, and by April 23, 1858, he reported to Crowther that the first mission house in the Igbo district was completed, but very soon he was involved in some kind of compound squabbles. He had stayed temporarily in the compound of one Mr. Orikaobue (an unwise act on his part) thereby earning the envy of the king, who changed his mind about the site he had previously shown for a mission house. Instead he wanted it paid for or rented. Taylor reported by Isichei (1971) describes the incident dramatically thus:

The king had deceived me about the spot which we had selected; he wanted me to purchase the ground at once or rent it. I found out that it was through jealousy on account of my staying at Orikaobue’s village. His son Odili is very ambitious, it was through him I lose the spot.(p.8).

Assisted by Orikaobue, a much better plot (250 by 280) was given to the mission by an unnamed poor man. On this plot house (50 by 30) was erected (Isichei, 1971). Onitsha, the high way into the Igboland, had the headquarters of the C.M.S. in Igboland, and it remains so until today. Taylor’s next activity was to start a school. On April 24, 1858, he wrote to the Rev. H. Venn that in August 1857 he had begun a school with thirty boys who had remarkably in so short a time, acquired the elements of alphabet, and could spell two letters such as *b-a-ba* using Mr. Crowther’s primer.(Kalu,1978). The same mission house served the congregation of eighty to one hundred and fifty for divine service which had previously been conducted in the open.

Taylor's activities did not go unrewarded, for Rev. Crowther recommended him to the bishop for the priesthood so that he might serve the church more fully and by the end of the year, the Onitsha staff had increased and were paid handsomely. (Azubike,2007).

Consequently, work continued in the boy's school as reported by (Okeke, 2006) but were far from docile, as they regarded "with air of disdain letters by the school master... as if it were a thing only fit for females, too much confining to them as free rovers of the fields."(p.9). On the account of Isichei (1971), she reported that on November 15, 1858, a landmark was created by the opening of what appeared to be girl's school, since there were fourteen pupils-all girls-in attendance. They were naked and so Crowther clothed them in satin stripe cotton goods which in his view "altered their appearance as marked school children" (p.2). Unfortunately, the staff was depleted in December 1858 by the death of veteran interpreter Simon Jonas in Fernando Po. His death was a sad loss to the cause of evangelism in Igboland. Taylor's progress report to H. Venn dated December 17, 1858, presented by Barrett (1971) stated that there was plenty of good oil, castor oil, a variety of seeds growing luxuriantly, abundant cotton and red pepper. The report emphasized the importance of attracting the Manchester manufacturers to the trade in cotton in the Igbo region, and Taylor went so far as to send a specimen of the Niger cotton to Rev. Venn for testing. In his exact words Barrett(1971), also wrote about Thompson, Laird's agent whom he described as "a very clever man in his work, and who had exerted himself and had more oil in his possession than the previous year, so much that the sunbeam for want of casks left behind which would fill up about 12-42 puncheons"(p.3).

Whether Crowther was judicious in linking his organization to trading, concern will be seen in latter developments. However, the apparent effect of the link was that the church was regarded as an arm of commerce and government. Crowther could not discern a danger to the cause of the church in the joint enterprise for he had jubilantly written to the secretary on December 2, 1858, which was presented by Okeke (2006) thus: "Our house and factory have become neutral grounds on which contending parties meet, and talk together as friends to their own surprise. They themselves have remarked the change, and foretold it is we who shall put an end to their old grudge and quarrels inherited from their fathers" (p.4). In the joint enterprise each had much to gain from the other but the church seemed to gain more even though evangelistic results were not startling as the following reports by Crowther and Romaine respectively (Clarke,1992).

After twenty eight years presence of the C.M.S. in Igboland, the Roman Catholic Church represented by the Holy Ghost Fathers came into the Igbo community in 1885 thereby becoming the second Christian denomination to expand the frontiers of Christianity in Igboland. It was exactly on the 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 1885, that Rev. Father Joseph Lutz, aged 32, was appointed by the Superior General, Ambrose Emonet, to lead the missionary expedition to the Lower Niger. The choice of Father Lutz was well advised

for several reasons. He had eight years of experience in Africa in the difficult missions of Sierra Leone and Rio Pongas in the present Republic of Guinea. A French veteran of the Vicariate of two Guineas would have been an obvious choice to head a missionary outpost of that Vicariate, but the Niger was an English sphere of influence—hence the choice of Joseph Lutz, who had worked in an English Colony and a working knowledge of the English language (Ozigbo, 1982). The other members of the pioneer team were Father John Horne, and two lay brothers, Hermas Huck and John of Gotheau. All three were from the Alsace Province of France. They were all youthful and had no missionary experience. Father Horne, aged 27, had been ordained and professed barely a month before the expedition left Paris on 29<sup>th</sup> September, 1885, Brothers Hermas and John, aged 20 and 28 respectively, made their religious professions in 1885 (Ozigbo, 1982). Father Lutz went to England ahead of his team to make the necessary travel arrangements. The party eventually left Liverpool for the Niger on the 10<sup>th</sup> October 1885. After a week spent in seeing their confreres in Freetown, they reached Akassa on 20<sup>th</sup> November but the party was refused entry into the Niger by the officials of the English company. The English company in question was the National African Company which was formed in 1879 through the amalgamation of three British companies trading in the Lower Niger (Isichei, 1971).

However, it was reported by Ozigbo (1982) that Mr. Charles Townsend, a merchant, an English and protestant, housed them in Brass. This Father Jordan characteristically wrote on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 1885 and it reads:

Like the other river ports, however, Akassa was not under the control of any European government, but of a band of traders known as the Royal Niger Company. The agent of the company, rather incongruously named Captain, refused them permission to move up to the river. Nothing daunted, Fr. Lutz made his way to a second port, named Brass. Here he was fortunate enough to meet a kindly and accommodating English protestant trader, a certain Mr. Townsend. The latter not only gave them permission to explore but offered them a tiny and out-of-motor boat (p.42).

Moreover, on hearing that the Catholic missionaries were at Onitsha, Mr. Sergeant invited them to see him. The meeting took place at the Obosi beach, and in the meeting, Fr. Lutz and his men were guaranteed assistance and support in their mission. Fr. Lutz was consequently allowed to return to Brass via Akassa to bring up the lay Brothers and their luggage. Meanwhile, he took care of Father Horne who was then unwell. He later offered them one of the Company's house at Onitsha waterside to use until they were able to erect their own house. According to Fr. Lutz, Mr. Sergeant apologized for the incident at Akassa. However, the refusal to pass through the Akassa may seem embarrassing, but it appears to have been twisted and blown up to serve other interests. It made Fr. Lutz and his men to proceed to Brass to find an alternative entrance to the Niger. There, Mr. Townsend and a German trader, Mr. Sehneke, received them very warmly. For four days, they housed, fed and generally briefed the Catholic missionaries on the missionary prospects and the operations of the C.M.S. in the Niger Basin. Mr. Townsend himself decided to take Father Lutz and

Father Horne in his own river Steamer up the Niger while the lay Brothers remained at Brass until a site was selected for a settlement. Up the Niger, Townsend took them first to Atani and then to Onitsha. They by-passed Aboh, Osomari and other riverine areas. Throughout their journey, Mr. Townsend acted as their guide and guarantor and both Atani and Onitsha, they were well received, as the Obi and his chiefs allowed them to choose a site.

Their early missionary work for the first fifteen years was concentrated in and around Onitsha. The first five years was devoted exclusively to Onitsha and its sole Holy Trinity mission station, at the bank of the Niger (water side). A half-hearted and unsuccessful attempt was made to open a second station at Onitsha inland town. Occasional visits were paid to the towns of Odekpe, Atani, Abo, Nkwelle, Ogbunike and Brass, but these visits were more of courtesy or curiosity than for evangelistic ends. The most significant development took place during the next period of five years (1891-1894). In 1890, a Catechist was posted to Aguleri on the Omambala (Anambra) river, 25 miles from Onitsha. This station became the second residential mission on the 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1891, when Fr. Pawlaws arrived to take charge of it. Then on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 1892, a Catechist was posted to Nsugbe, half way between Onitsha and Aguleri. Nsugbe became the third residential station in 1894 with Fr. John Mary Cadio in charge. Later on, the Aguleri mission opened a sub-station at Igbariam.

Consequent on the above, it was gathered by Ozigbo (1982) that the summation of the Roman Catholic Mission (R.C.M.) in Igboland took four main forces, viz:

- a. The provision of medical services
- b. The redemption and rehabilitation of slaves, social and helpless.
- c. Education in literacy and vocational training
- d. The deliberate play on the psychological and aesthetic susceptibilities of the evangelized.

The Primitive Methodists, the most aggressive among the Protestants came to Igboland in the late 1893. They spread the Christian faith from Oron on the Cross River to the interior of Igboland in two decades. With the construction of the railway that linked Enugu to Port Harcourt, the Methodists were able to move from Uhube, Ngoro, Bende and occupied the important railway junctions: Ovimi, Agbani, Uzuakoli, Umuahia, and Aba. By 1925, they were established at Otukpo and PortHarcourt. They envisaged Umuahia and Uzuakoli as their Igbo headquarters because the more probable event is that either Umuahia or Uzuakoli will be more important than Aba as a trading centre (Kalu, 1978). The Qua Ibo Mission also came into Igboland in 1917 to help in the Christianization of the Igbo people (Ozigbo,1999). The Qua Ibo Mission was in some respects unique among other missionary societies for it was free from denominational sectarianism. They were a small poorly financed non-denominational mission. They started work among the Ibibio in 1881. They were later impeded by the Methodists, a kind of missionary rivalry which led their expansion into the western part of Imo River. The Mission was not concerned with making people Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists or anything but Christians. It was a church that sought in a very literal and real way to be indigenous, self governing and self financing. In terms of expansion, the Qua Ibo Mission began slowly with only 250

members in 1910, some twenty years of beginning work in Nigeria. Then between 1910 and 1939, the growth rate increased considerably, bringing the membership up to 42,0000 (Clarke, 1992). However, this multiplication of churches in Igboland came with its attendant jealousy and unhealthy rivalry and competitions as a way of making more members and becoming richer than the others. This as a matter of fact has created some negative consequences for the church today.

Following the multiplicity of Christian churches in the present South-East Nigeria especially the Pentecostal faith, the idea of begging for wealth then became a veritable means of winning converts. The people who seek the spiritual means of making wealth then turn to them for succor. The new churches claimed they would transform the lives of their members financially and so would attract so many converts through that. According to Ndiokwere (1995), the Pentecostal churches through prayers and miracles would promise their members of meeting their demands for prosperity, health and success in their life endeavours. A situation where a greater percentage of the Igbo Christians are poor, such assurances for wealth and economic wealth being will herald a new day for millions of the Igbo Christians. Following this development however, some Christian groups and church leaders in a bid to gather as many crowds as possible, will adulterate and commercialize the word of God to attract those that are desperate for wealth, healing and deliverance without any serious transformation in their lives.

### **3. The Dangers of Wealth and Prosperity Preaching**

The emphasis on wealth and prosperity by the Pentecostal preachers has caused more harm than good to the overall existence of Christianity in Igboland and Nigeria in general. Some of its devastating effects include the following:

#### **a. Heresy and Deceit in the Church**

The wanton and desperate pursuit for wealth by some gospel preachers have given rise to scandalous and misleading preaching made against one another in a bid to remain more relevant in the society. The preaching made to retain members who are desperate for money have created an atmosphere for heresy and deceit amongst the adherents of the various denominations in Igboland. In response to this have made some Christians to resort to migrating from one church to the other as a result of dissatisfaction. With the growing rate of church proliferations and proselytism of people who at one time or the other have decamped from the mainline churches have through their eloquent prosperity preaching influenced and attracted many followers to their new church (Nwankwo,2018). The theology of these Pentecostal and prayer movements with which they draw members from the main stream churches are structured in such a way that they claim to provide a window into the problems of man and in that way people turn to them because of the many confrontations of life ranging from social, economic, political, and psychological concerns. The assurances of these religious sects are the reason why many people have turned to them and because of the rigidity of the mainstream churches, they felt that it is only in those prayer houses that their problems would be solved. Also, based on the fact that an average Igbo person believes that to get answers or solutions to existential problems, religious people need charismatic

persons to interpret the divine mind is the main reason why these charismatic movements have thrived greatly in the south-east Nigeria and some Igbo Christians have made recourse to migrating across the myriads of the prayer houses in order to have their problems and needs solved.

#### **b. Multiplicity of Prayer Houses and Increase in Crimes Rate in Igboland**

Many prayer houses and fellowship centres are springing up on daily basis across the various communities of Nigeria and this is owing to the high emphasis on wealth and possessiveness through religious means. The mission churches has over the last two millennia been of great river and a source of life to the Pentecostal and new generation churches. The rivers of the mission churches of the Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Methodist have irrigated and fertilized the sprouting of the new generation movements. Being that the Nigerian society has a large concentrations of the orthodox churches especially the Catholic and Anglican denominations, these Pentecostal and new generation movements have pitched their tents to snatch disgruntled elements from these mainstream churches who are desperate for signs and wonders. Based on the available records, it appears that the new found faith are gradually dethroning the already existing monopoly of the mission churches in Nigeria (Ozigbo,1982).

This as a matter of fact have increased the rate of criminal activities in Igboland. Many crimes are being perpetrated in the name of religion and by supposed Men of God. Moreover, it has been discovered that the quest for wealth and material possessions are strong reasons why some religious men indulge in crime. A detailed investigation have also proven that about 57% of the people who engage on criminal activities are being protected and covered up by some church leaders for their selfish financial gains. These so called Men of God are directly or indirectly facilitating the crime rate by their activities which include giving preferential treatments to their wealthy members, accepting financial contributions from the suspected members of the public. When church leaders accept all sorts of gifts without questioning the source, they directly or indirectly promotes evil in the society. When the leaders of the church are rightly representing God in their words and deeds, they should be able to correct anomalies and shun evil. They should be able to reject gifts from the gullible elements in the society.

#### **4. Measures for Curbing the Excesses of Wealth and Prosperity Gospel Preachers**

The following are the recommendations which are given as solutions to the identified problems above occasioned by the over emphasis of wealth and materialism amongst some of the gospel preachers.

- \* Preaching the Truth of Salvation
- \*Persevering in prayer
- \*Expanding employment opportunities

### **Preaching the Truth of Salvation**

Having analyzed some of the causative factors to the exaltation of wealth amongst the preachers of the gospel; the first step forward should be to refer to the mission requirement of the church; the missionary mandate give by Christ Himself. When he finished His earthly ministry, Jesus sent out His Apostles to continue from where He stopped. He gave them charge to go to the nations and make them His disciples and baptize them in the name of the Holy Trinity. The apostles in obedience to the command of their master, strived and preached the Gospel to all men. The mission mandate of the church is ultimately grounded in the eternal love of the Most Holy Trinity. This implies that the church on earth is by her nature one, since according to the plan of the Father, is collaborating with the Son and the Holy Spirit. The ultimate purpose of the church therefore is none other than to make men share in the communion between the Father and the Son in their Spirit of Love. It is from God's love for all men that the church in every age receives both the obligation and vigour of her missionary dynamism.

Indeed, God's desires that the church should be an avenue to lead all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. That is the absolute will of God. Salvation is therefore found in this truth. Those who obey the prompting of the Spirit of truth are already on the way of salvation. However, the church, to whom this truth has been entrusted, must go out to meet their desire so as to bring them this truth of salvation. The Holy Spirit being the protagonist (the principal agent of the whole of the church's mission) leads the church on her missionary paths. The paths unfolds the mission of Christ, who was sent to evangelize the poor, and set the captives free. The church also being motivated by the Spirit of Christ, must walk the road Christ Himself walked, a way of poverty and obedience, of service and self sacrifice even to death, a death from which emerged victorious by His resurrection. So, it is based on this that Tertulian, the foremost apologetic of old, maintained that the "Blood of the Matyrs is the seed of the Church".

On her pilgrimage, the church have also experienced the discrepancy existing between the message she proclaims and the human weakness of those to whom the Gospel has been entrusted. This Watt (2015) insisted that it is only by taking the narrow way of the cross that the people of can God extend Christ's reign thus, "for just as Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and oppression, so the church is called to follow the same path if she is to effectively communicate the fruits of salvation to men" (p.350). Watt further insisted that, "the church travels the same journey as all humanity and shares the same earthly lot with the world, she is to be leaven and, as it were, the soul of human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God" (p.351).

### **Persevering in Prayer**

Prayer and astute faith in God is unquestionably the best form of response to all life situations, even if it has gotten beyond human control. It needs no argument to prove that prayer is the universal human reaction to any crises or desperate situations. Prayer helps to sharpen one's faith in God and living faith largely depends on what is called a life of prayer. If a person does not open up to God in prayer, he/she will not be able to develop a strong and vigorous faith. Prayer in the time of trouble is the best approach to difficult and hard times. A Christian can be exposed to both hard and easy times. Praying for only wealth and material prosperity is not actually the perfect will of God. (Bounds, 1984). In a nutshell, it could be said that the Christian God does not encourage laziness. He responds to needs and aspirations of His creatures who trusts in Him. The prayer of a Christian must not base only on wealth, comfort and earthly possessions. Jesus never prayed for riches neither did His disciples. On the night before His death, His distress grew beyond human explanations that he had to pray earnestly to God for succor. Jesus' reaction to His personal challenges is what this study adopts as the best form of approach to life uncertainties. Persevering in prayer however, is considered the best form of approach to existential issues rather than running helter skelter from one church to the other.

### **Expanding Employment Opportunities**

One of the reasons why Nigerian Christians are vehemently after wealth is unemployment. Due to the high rate of unemployment in the country, the people sees the church as the next available option. The teeming population of the Igbo people especially the young ones have so much affected the rate of unemployment that relocating from rural to urban areas has further heightened the rate of unemployment especially among the city dwellers. Also, due to the scarce availability of job opportunities, church business has thereby taken the center. Because religious matters are taken seriously amongst the Igbo people coupled with the fact that the people respects and values anything that comes from the church; using church to make money has become a lucrative business enterprise. Therefore, being that the church pays handsomely, the people then migrates from one geographical location to another in search for churches that will satisfy their economic quest.

Unemployment has forced many people especially the youths to either find or join churches that will guarantee their financial desire. This has become more noticeable among the school drop outs, the illiterate men and women who are easily deceived. As they migrates from their villages to the cities and semi-urban cities; the scarcely available jobs lures them into these churches. At times, some of these churches engage them with little stipends and peanuts. These churches would train and engage some of the church migrants as evangelists, prophets and pastors. They are exposed on how to use their mouth-technique to fend for themselves. For example, some of them uses the act of speaking in tongues to play into the psyche of the people and at the end dupe them. This is largely necessitated by the high rate of unemployment in the country. Furthermore, because of the high rate of unemployment in Nigeria, many people have taken the church as easiest way to beating down the biting economic crunch in the

country. In that way, many of the youths and school leavers migrates from one church to the other as the quickest way to get rich and being employed.

## **5. Conclusion**

The problem created by the desperate quest for wealth amongst the desperate Christians in Igboland and Nigeria in general is a multi-dimensional one. The most worrisome part of the problem is that the practice is aggressively attacking the cherished Christian Kerigmatic understanding of the church which is outlined in accordance with the standard and practices of the primitive church. It is also in defiance to the recorded and stipulated pattern of the church as recorded and transmitted in both the scriptures and the early Christian traditions. Christianity as a religion is a belief in Christ. It is not solely for the satisfaction and attainment of man's expressive and adaptive needs. Specifically, the church is not meant to be a personal property. It is neither a platform for religious competitions. Signs and wonders on the other hand is not supposed to be a medium by which members are attracted from other church denominations. In fact every spiritual assistance should be rendered to all and sundry, irrespective of one's religious affiliations. Jesus never performed his miracles under religious considerations, rather he extended to all that sought for Him. He therefore commanded his disciples to render their spiritual services free of charge/without conditions, because they were given the power free.

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