

## **POVERTY AND INSECURITY IN NIGERIA: MAJOR CAUSATIVE FACTORS TO THE INTER-DENOMINATIONAL MIGRATION OF CHRISTIANS IN IGBOLAND**

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### **Abstract**

The research work investigated the pitfalls in Nigeria's leadership system in the areas of poverty and insecurity. It has been discovered that the high rate of poverty and insecurity in Nigeria have propelled the inter-denominational migration of Christians in Igboland. Findings have proven that this generation of Nigerian leaders have failed both themselves and the nation woefully. It is an obvious fact that the Nigerian problem is embedded in its leadership. With the culture of failed values, flight of the truth, devalued norms, downward slide in basic morals, celebrated poverty and insecurity prevalent in the Nigerian political space, the people have no choice other than to seek solutions in churches; thereby promoting the practice of inter-denominational migration of Christians. This practice is being undertaken mostly by Igbo Christians as a panacea for survival and insatiable quest for prosperous and secured life conditions. As an enduring and surviving strategy, the people have resorted to crisscrossing from one church to the other so as to make ends meet thereby leading to an incessant rise in churches especially the group known as Pentecostals. However, the problem of this study is that moving from one church to the other for whatever reason has increased jealousy, unhealthy competitions, wickedness, and other social vices due to an excessive desire for wealth and materialism. These are the reasons why the researchers think there is a need to x-ray and analyze the leadership structure of Nigerian government so as to address some of the political imbalances that have laid credence to the religious practice. The method of approach is historical and descriptive nature method of research with the primary and secondary sources of data collection.

### **Introduction**

From time immemorial, Nigeria's abiding and timeless problem has been the failure of leadership. By definition, leadership is influence that inspires through character, lifting a man's vision, raising his performance, and building his personality beyond its normal limits (Osisioma, 2021). Achebe (1983) presented the state of Nigerian nation and its leadership thus:

There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the challenge of personal example which is the hallmark of true leadership... I am saying that Nigeria can change today if she discovers leaders who have the will, the ability and the vision,... The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership (p.7).

Having discovered the major problem of Nigeria, Achebe (2002) traced the genesis of the problem thus:

The post Nigeria-Biafra civil war era saw a unified Nigeria saddled with a greater and more insidious reality. We were plagued by a home-grown enemy: the political ineptitude, mediocrity, indiscipline, ethnic bigotry, and corruption of the ruling class.

Compounding the situation was the fact that Nigeria was now awash in oil boom petrodollars...

A new era of great decadence and decline was born, it continues to this

day... Economic deprivation and corruption produce and exacerbate financial and social inequalities in a population, which in turn fuel political instability (p.8).

The above submissions have made it clear that Nigeria's problem is embedded in its political leaders. Nigeria lacks inspirational and motivational leaders who do not care or border to identify the needs and preferences of their citizens who voted them into power. Instead of fulfilling their campaign promises, they would rather channel their ego to fame, power, and enriching their pockets through public funds.

Successful leaders do not necessarily have the loudest voice, but the most attentive ear. Without some good leadership sterling qualities, a society will be culturally impoverished. However, poverty in this study denotes a condition of not having enough resources to meet basic needs including food, clothing and shelter. Insecurity in this study also refers to a state of being uncertain about one thing or the other, which may include job, protection, food, health, shelter, career, emotions, feelings, government or livelihood. It is a state of being doubtful which could be influenced by decisions, opinions, actions, attitudes, responses and counter-responses. In the context of this paper, insecurity refers to the state of lawlessness, instability, anxiety, and exposure to danger caused by social vices such as terrorism, crime, kidnapping, killings and maiming, religious and extra-judicial killings. Insecurity in this context also includes, loss of lives, property, and business, terror and huge fear of sudden danger, community violence, harassment, emotional insecurity and threats as well as blatant divisions or disputes among ethnics, religious sects and groups, as many as such cases that are found in Nigeria. Inter-denominational migration as used in this study is applied to an act or fact of religious conversion, and it also includes actions which invite such conversion.

It is however, the argument of this study that bad governance in Nigeria is the reason for this conditions. The study deduced that it is the absence of the basic leadership qualities amongst the Nigeria's political class that has been fueling the high rate of insecurity, poverty and practice of inter-denominational migration of Christians in Nigeria especially in the south-east. Because the leaders have failed the people in almost all the spheres of life is the reason why the people have resorted to commercializing the church by means inter-denominational migration of Christians. This study is concerned on how poverty and insecurity has contributed to the high rate of the practice especially amongst the Igbo Christians. The researchers involved an empirical and analytical procedures to arrive at a reliable and replicable study. This will also help the researchers arrive at some lasting solutions to the problem.

### **The Conceptual Clarification for Christians Inter-denominational Migration**

The concept of inter-denominational can be clarified as a distinct class, group or denomination of things or people. The prefix inter- signifies; among, between, amid, as, interact, inter-articular, or intermit. Denomination on its sense denotes a process identifying word or words by which someone or something is called and classified or distinguished from others. In a religious sense it denotes a different group of religious congregations having its own organization and a distinct faith. Ekechi (1971), in collaboration with the above view point clarified the concept of inter-denominational as an autonomous Christian body that has an independent administration with distinct religious ideologies and belief system. He went ahead to state that it denotes the various church denominations or sect which upholds a narrow-minded adherence to particular forms of Christian practice. Dike (2012) on his part maintained that the concept of inter-denomination represents people who belong to different religious groups. He went ahead to state that the concept of interdenominational is the act of categorizing or making category, particularly of a religion. An example being "Catholicism" as in the case of a Catholic denomination and "Anglicanism" as in Anglican denomination. He further stated that each of the denominations has a particular religious body, with a specific name, organization, and other characteristics that is personal to them as a religious group. Dike also made attempt to distinguish the concepts of inter-denominational and non-denominational by stating that the concept "non-denominational" is used by people who belong to some religious group that are not restricted to a single denomination. However, for the usage in this study, Dike's position agrees to the argument of this study to a reasonable extent. The context of inter-denominational as used in this study represents a church or organization that subscribes to no particular Christian denomination.

However, following its usage in this study, the concept of inter-denominational represents an independent state of a given church or Christian congregation. That is a church or a Christian denomination that is not under the control of any other church. In other words, the context of inter-denominational as an ecclesiastical terminology is conceptualized in this study as principles that individual congregation or church is an autonomous and equalitarian society free from any external ecclesiastical control. It is in this line of thought that this study would investigate certain occurrences happening between or among the various churches or denominations in Igboland.

### **Migration as a Concept**

Migration as a concept can be presented as the movement of persons from one country or locality to another. For Clarke (2012), it is the movement of people or animals from one area to another. Africa is often seen as a continent of mass migration and displacement caused by poverty, violence and environmental stress. In recent years, irregular migration from Africa to Europe has received extensive attention. Moreover, migration is not a new phenomenon, it has engaged the attentions of researchers, economists, and diplomats. In customary parlance, the concept of human migration is an act of either settling permanently or temporarily, at a new location (geographic region). The movement often occurs over long distances and from one country to another but internal migration (within a single country) is also possible; indeed, this is the dominant form of human migration globally. People may migrate as individuals, in family units or in large groups. There are four major forms of migration: invasion, conquest, colonization and emigration/immigration. Persons moving from their homes due to forced displacement (such as natural disaster or civil disturbance) may be described as displaced persons or, if remaining in the home country, internally-displaced persons. A person who seeks refuge in another country can, if the reason for leaving the home country is political, religious, or another form of persecution, make a formal application to that country where refuge is sought and is usually described as an asylum seeker. If this application is successful this person's legal status becomes that of a refugee. However, when applied to this study migration as a concept is meant as the act or fact of religious conversion, and it also includes actions which invite such conversion. For Clarke (2012), it is act of becoming or condition of being a proselyte. Actually, in other religions like Judaism, religious migration or proselytism is somewhat a foreign concept to Orthodox Jews, as they are commanded to push away newcomers. Inter-church migrations or proselytism as the case may be is different from evangelism in that to proselytize is to encourage or induce people to join a religious movement while evangelism is to tell people about the gospel irrespective of the churches' affiliation. Such movement may occur as individuals, in family units or in large groups. This is because if one proselytizes or migrates to a particular church, he/she would try to persuade someone else to share his/her new beliefs. That is why the practice is like a contagious disease and persons engaging in it will always find reasons for doing so. Although, Christians are commanded to proselytize, but the Bible is clear that one should not be manipulated into conversion by human means (John 6:44). A true conversion is one drawn by God Himself. Such is the right form of religious conversion. This is achieved through witnessing, sharing the gospel, and speaking the truth of the gospel and the converts are drawn by the Holy Spirit not by coercion or inducements. That is one difference between Christianity and other religions.

The concept of migration being used in this study to represent the movement of people from one church to another is meant to address some of the various reasons for the movement. This is because some persons who proselyte or migrate to different churches do that for the purpose of gaining life satisfaction and fulfillments of certain accomplishments. This Nwandu (2009) maintains that it is a religious expression that involves the movement of people from one church to the other in search for solutions to the existential problems of life. This was observed to be a long standing tradition among the Christians in the south-east of Nigeria. The movement usually occurs in almost all the Christian denominations/churches in Igboland. The migration is mostly a movement from a church of one's baptism into another church. Sometimes it is either from the mainstream/mission churches to the new generation churches or vice versa. Some of the identified causes of migration from the mainline churches to the Indigenous religious movements include; the quest for personal, religious, ethnic, cultural and academic identities. Other factors include economic, political, ecclesiastical, social, and

doctrinal factors amongst others (Nmah, 2008; Ndiokwere, 1995; and Barrett, 1970). However, it is based on these perspectives that the concept of migration is being investigated in this study.

### **The Miserable Condition of Nigeria Today and Its Contribution to Inter-denominational Migration of Christians**

Two major factors to the issue of Christian's inter-denominational migration in the modern Igbo society is the insecurity and poverty crises prevalent in the region. In the recently released report by the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2019), the south-east states performed badly and below expectation. While Ebonyi was the worst in the south-east with 80% of her citizens being described as poor, Enugu took the second position with about 60% poverty level. Following was Abia state that recorded 31%, then Imo 29% while Anambra scored 15%. On the average, the poverty level in the south-east is about 43% which means that about 43 percent of south eastern citizens of Nigeria are classified as poor. With a below per capital annual expenditure of about N137,430 is the baseline for being poor using a population estimate of 50 million means that about 21.5 million of south-easterners are unable to afford and spend about N11,000 per person every month. Of the ten states with the least poverty level, only Anambra made it at 8<sup>th</sup> position despite all the branded entrepreneurship skills of the Igbo people. Unfortunately, this miserable condition has pushed majority of Igbo Christians to jumping from one church to the other. This practice seems to have replaced the Igbo traditional practice of consulting shrines to ascertain spiritual solutions to problems. The danger here is that the practice has turned some churches into business centres instead of house of prayers. Apparently, the engine house of this practice is attributed to poverty crisis with the unprecedented level of insecurity which the governors of the south-east have through their clumsy actions and inactions allowed to have escalated.

Generally, Nigeria as a country labours under the burden of abject poverty in the midst of plenty. A nation with vast, enormous and prosperous potentials (material and human resources inclusive) is suffering in the midst of plenty. Nigerians are known for their resilience, industry, courage, and excellence. The country is blessed with some of the best brains the African continent has ever produced. The celebrated Prof. Kenneth Onwuka Dike who was the first Vice-Chancellor of University of Ibadan, Prof. Chike Obi; the renowned mathematician, the literary giant, Prof. Chinua Achebe, and the international computer wizard and pioneer of the internet; Philip Emeagwali, are all citizens of Nigeria and Igboland particularly. These noblemen had a tradition of excellence and integrity which made them outstanding.

According to (NBS, 2020), Despite these great achievements and great potentials, Nigeria has the dubious honour of being a leading nation among the fragile and failing economies, with steadily declining human development index. Nigeria's Human Development Index (HDI) for 2019 stands at 0.539 which kept the country in the low human development category. Following this report however, Nigeria now ranks 161 out of 189 countries in human development. Between 2005 and 2019, Nigeria's HDI value has just increased from 0.465 to 0.539 percent in nearly 15 years. Furthermore, according to their Transparency International Corruption Index ranking for 2020, Nigeria was placed 149<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries studied. World Bank figures also indicated that over \$400 billion had been stolen from Nigeria's treasury between 1960 and 1992. What this means is that, Nigeria's politicians have stolen the equivalent of the entire economy of a European country in four decades because \$400 billion is approximately the GDP of Norway and Sweden put together

On the state of security, the Fragile Index (FSI) 2020, released by the US-based Fund for Peace ranked Nigeria at number 13 out of 176 countries considered. The Index comprises of twelve conflict risk indicators that are used to measure the condition of a state at any given moment. Their value of index include; security apparatus, factionalized elites, group grievance, economic decline, uneven economic development, human flight and brain drain, state legitimacy, public services, human services, human rights and rule of law, demographic pressures, refugees and IDPs, and external intervention. The higher the value of index, the more fragile the country is.

A country is considered a fragile state when it is unable to perform its duties on several levels of human development. With an uncontrolled violence and internal war, persistent and massive erosion in the standards of living, unpardonable decay in the infrastructure of ordinary life, and with the greed of the rulers overwhelming their responsibility to improve the welfare of the citizenry; it is not out of place to consider Nigeria as a Failed State. After all, a failed state is one which trust and mutual obligation between the state and citizens are weak. Nigeria is a country where conflicts and chronic poverty are the order of the day and its public policy, preoccupied with maintaining security and kick-starting economy. Based on the most recent official survey data from the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (2011), 39.1 percent of Nigerians lived below the international poverty line of \$1.90 per person per day. Moreover, the World Bank says that the general increase in food prices which occurred between June 2020 and June 2021 may have increased the percentage of Nigerians living below the national poverty line from 40.1 percent to 42.8 percent.

Consequently, poverty and insecurity in Nigeria have made many to lose their sense of self-worth and confidence. Many of the poor people, being beaten by the harsh economic and security conditions in the country have settled to migrating from one church denomination to the other in search of solutions. This has reduced the church to mere political parties where one joins and leaves at will. If a certain church or pastor is not charismatic enough or does not preach economic prosperity one has no business being in that church. This is troubling because most fake pastors have ceased the opportunity to involve magical and diabolic means to dupe disgruntled elements who are desperate for signs and wonders and economic emancipation. This is painting the church in Nigeria in a bad light especially in Igboland where such practice is very common.

#### **Estimated Rate of the Migration in the Present Day Igboland**

The mission churches have over the last two millennia been of great river and a source of life to the Pentecostal and new generation churches. From the statistics gathered in Awka metropolis of Anambra state, the rivers of the mission churches of the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches have irrigated and fertilized the sprouting of the new generation movements. Being that the Igbo 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 Igboland (Ozigbo,1982).

According to data from the Pew Research Centre Database (2003), Christians in Igboland as at the year 2000, constituted mainly of the mainstream churches which are estimated to be about 8 million. Consequently, a follow up research in 2010 reported that 25% out of the 65% of overall Christian population of Igbo people now belong to the Pentecostals and other independent religious movements. The implication of this development however is that the new religious movements(Pentecostals inclusive) in Igboland is almost at a close range with the number of the entire protestant churches put together, being that the entire protestant population as at 2018 are estimated to be about 35%. Furthermore, from 2000 to 2005, there was a significant growth in the number of the new generation churches in Igboland which the leading churches amongst them were: the Redeemed Christian Church, Winners Chapel, Christ Apostolic, and Christ Embassy. The major Aladura Movement thereby being, The Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim and Holy Sabbath Mission Incorporated. Apparently, the impressive growth of the Pentecostal and the new generation churches mostly in the 2000s has brought about a huge decline of the European founded churches (Achunike,2004). This is because of the fact that the African Initiated and Pentecostal churches have had their field day in reconverting the dissatisfied Orthodox Church members. Even some of the ones who still retained the membership of the orthodox churches have remained there for some socio-political and socio-cultural reasons.

Consequently, the phenomenal growth of the indigenous churches according to Nwankwo (2016), started since 1970s and Pentecostalism the most populous of them all has experienced an increase of

about 25% from 1970 to 2005 which is a space of 35 years. Moreover, the current population of the south-east Nigeria according to 2003 census is 40 millions and as at the year 2000, the Catholic population alone was about 40%. Therefore for the Pentecostal church alone to reach up to 25% in Igboland within a space of three years means that the ice bag is gradually melting (Ichoku,2018). It is further estimated that if nothing is done to address the rate of Christians inter-denominational migration in the south-east of Nigeria, the mission churches may soon experience a more devastating decline in the near future. Presently, it is estimated that out of the 33% of the entire protestant denominations in the south-east as at 2005, Pentecostal churches measures 18%. What this implies is that the number of Pentecostal faithful in Igboland have grown immeasurably in recent years.

Apparently, following other investigations made about the number of people baptized in each church denomination and the number that has left a given church to another showed for example, that out of the 72 people that was originally baptized as Catholics in south-east Nigeria in 2005, 56 of them, representing 26.4% of the total number, have left the church to other churches. Similarly, 44 of those 68 originally baptized as Protestants, representing about 34% of the total number, have left for other churches. Almost all those who were converted to the Pentecostal churches have changed from one Pentecostal denomination to other meaning that Pentecostals are the highly migrated Christians in Igboland. Further studies indicates that a reasonable percentage of the people who make up the entire Igbo Christian population have changed church at one time or the other. It is also discovered that the number of dissatisfied Christians have continued to arise as the day goes by. For example, an estimate of about 47% of the Christian population are satisfied with their present church denomination while about 53% are not. Moreover, it has been discovered that lack of satisfaction is a strong indication for potential move to another church. A detailed investigation have proven that about 37% of the people who are not satisfied with their present church denomination is because of too much levy or contribution while about 32% of the people are migrating to other churches as a panacea or survival due to the harsh economic and security conditions prevalent in Nigeria and Igboland in particular. Other insists that the homily/worship of their churches are boring. Still about 7% are not satisfied because of the level of accountability in their churches.

### **The Possible Way Forward**

Having established how poverty and insecurity in Nigeria and Igboland in particular have necessitated the inter-denominational migration of Christians as a panacea for survival. The ultimate way forward now lies on the problem of Nigerian maladministration. The study advocates that some issues in Nigerian administration should be carefully addressed so as to chart a new course for the country. Leadership can move a nation from the fringes of international relevance to an emerging industrial and economic power house; that is the story of Singapore and South Korea. Leadership can transform a poor village cattle boy and jail-bird into an international statesman, the world's number one citizen, and a frontline opinion and character moulder; that is the story of Mandela (Osisioma, 2021). Leadership can make a man dream dreams that may outlive him by leaving lasting legacies for generations yet unborn; that is the story of Martin Luther King Jr. In the other way round, leadership, or lack of it, can turn a people's potentials for greatness into an arid wasteland and a nightmare, which is the story of Nigeria. Leadership is about inspiration, a human activity that comes from the heart and considers the hearts of others. It is an attitude, not a routine. It is a service, not a dictatorship. If leadership is a service, how many Nigerian leaders are really servants? If truly leadership is partnership, how many Nigerian leaders are truly and sincerely in partnership with the people they govern and direct? How many Nigerian leaders can one attest to be men of character and integrity, not by virtue of position or title but by virtue of results they have produced? Obviously, getting answers to these questions is actually fixing the problem of Nigeria.

Inter-denominational migration of Christians is mostly common in Igboland because an Igboman hardly settles for hunger, frustration and hardship. Because Igbo people tend to value money and material possessions is why the practice is very common in the region. To shun this practice however, the government, church, philanthropists, and non-charitable organizations should join hands together to

alleviate the plight of the poor in the society. By this therefore, the idea of moving from one church to the other would be drastically reduced. While helping and caring for the poor should not be based on religious sentiment like offering help based on one's church denomination, there would be no need for interdenominational migration of Christians. No one should be given condition to migrate to a particular church in order to receive financial or material assistance. Everyone has a freedom of worship and religion and that should not be toiled with. Offering assistance should be based on the fact that all humans are created equal and in God's image and likeness. It is this understanding that would spur the government to provide basic amenities without discrimination of tribe, religion, or race, and in fighting poverty and corruption not minding whose ox is gored.

St. James instructs the faithful in these words, "Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick. The Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven" (James 5:14-15). The church owes this as a duty to accompany the sick in their travails through visits, words of encouragement and prayers. This will be done irrespective of one's religious or denominational inclinations. Philanthropists and non-governmental organizations on their side should establish foundations aimed at helping the poor, the sick and the aged. This practice is common in the West, where people devote certain percentages of their yearly earnings to charity purposes. Many of such people provide for the poor in their wills through the church. In those developed countries, such donations are usually deducted in the taxes to be paid by the donors. Instead of spending millions of Naira to conduct funeral services of the deceased relatives in Africa, such resources should rather be channeled to the creation of foundations in honour of the dead. Through this, the poor would be helped to receive quality education and healthcare, establish businesses and be economically independent.

### **Conclusion**

The economy of Nigeria is so bad that many have lost hope in the system. The endemic corruption in the public service has left many without jobs, hungry, and sick. A lot of elderly men and women lack the necessary care to enable them age with grace. This condition of the country would be ameliorated by following the teaching of Christ in accompanying those who suffer in one way or another, assist them to understand their sufferings in the light of faith, unite it with the passion of Christ by restoring their hope and changing their conditions for better. In doing so, people's rights as regards to religion and worship should be absolutely respected. No one should be compelled or coerced to change his or her church to receive financial or material assistance. This in no small way will help reduce the rate of interdenominational migration prevalent in Nigeria especially in the south east.

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