

CHRISTIANITY IN NIGERIA: THE DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD OF DENOMINATIONAL PROLIFERATION

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Abstract

The proliferation of Christian denominations in Nigeria presents a complex dynamic that is both a blessing and a challenge. On one hand, denominational diversity fosters the expansion of Christianity, allowing the faith to adapt to Nigeria's vast cultural and ethnic diversity. This has led to the widespread establishment of churches across rural and urban areas, providing spiritual nourishment and promoting societal values. Denominations offer unique theological interpretations, styles of worship, and social initiatives, meeting the diverse needs of Nigeria's population and ensuring the faith remains vibrant and relevant. On the other hand, this rapid multiplication of denominations often creates significant challenges. Competition among churches can lead to divisions, rivalry, and the dilution of core Christian values. The pursuit of membership growth sometimes prioritizes sensationalism and prosperity teachings over genuine discipleship and spiritual maturity. Furthermore, denominational conflicts occasionally contribute to societal tensions, undermining the unity that Christianity seeks to promote. This double-edged sword of denominational proliferation in Nigeria necessitates careful navigation. Christian leaders are called to prioritize unity in diversity, emphasizing shared faith in Christ while respecting doctrinal differences. By fostering collaboration among denominations and addressing the challenges posed by competition and conflict, the Nigerian church can harness the benefits of its diversity to advance spiritual growth, societal transformation, and the holistic development of the nation.

Keywords: Christianity, Nigeria, Double-Edged Sword, Denominational, Proliferation

Introduction

Christianity in Nigeria dates back to the 16th century when the Portuguese introduced Latin Christianity in Benin and Warri. Looking at Christianity from that early beginning to the present time, many stages of development had taken place resulting to the planting and growth of churches. Several Christian churches around here and there. We will look at the factors that facilitate the emergence and growth of churches in Nigeria. Since, the foreign missionary emergence in the coast of

African continent, especially in Nigeria proliferation of Christian denominations had become a growing force across the country. According to Adeboye (2012) informed that, Pentecostal activities have raised concerns in most societies and among academics. The various manifestation of Pentecostal explosion in Africa and elsewhere in the world, have attracted the attention of scholars from different academic disciplines (p.146). In Nigeria, the proliferation of denominational churches is gradually becoming a social problem and this has been linked to a host of factors such as conflict situations in these churches and to other socio-economic/political factors associated with religious freedom and poor governance. To this Adeboye (2012) continued to opine that, Pentecostal churches are found in all manner of questionable places like ‘in cinema halls, and also in night clubs, hotels, and all such places previously demonized as abodes of sin by classical Pentecostals.(p.152). One apparently covert cause of Pentecostal church proliferation, which has not been critically explored and evaluated, is the role of intrachurch conflicts in Pentecostal church proliferation. Looking at Christianity from that early time to the present time, many stages of development had taken place resulting to the planting and establishment of churches. According to Adamolekun (2015) who said that the history of Christianity is divided into five parts as follow:

The history of church growth and development in Nigeria is divided into five periods namely: the period of introducing Latin Christianity in the 15th and 16th Centuries; the period of Denominationalism and missionary activities in the 19th Century from 1842 onward; the period of evolution of independent Churches; the period of indigenous African Churches; and the period of the birth of Charismatic and Pentecostal Churches. It is established in the paper that church growth led to numerical strength of churches as seen in the proliferation of churches in Nigeria. It is observed that the dramatic rise of charismatic and Pentecostal movement led to the emergence of new churches and evangelical groups. (p.1).

Today's Christians have misunderstood the purpose of the church, instead churches have been formed here and there and not all are with good motives. This is amazing because Jesus Christ was reported in the Bible to have said that, the Gospel should be preached to all nations (Mark 16:15). Then, Paul in Philippians 1:15-18, supports church planting and proliferation for the expansion of the kingdom of God. This is because religion is not fossil, but a living and dynamic phenomenon. It will surely continue to increase. Although, massive church planting has certain merits as will be discussed, but they are not strong enough for total commendation of the phenomenon.

Church proliferation is a process that results in a new (local) Christian denomination being established. It should be distinguished from church development, where a new service, new worship center or fresh expression is created that is integrated into an already established congregation. For a local church to be planted, it must eventually have a separate life of its own and be able to function without its parent body, even if it continues to stay in relationship denominationally or through being part of a network. Christians especially the missionary and clergy men have always believed that the most effective way to reach the world for Christ is by starting new churches. Every group of people and community needs a church. According to some scholars, the church is the hope of the world which is why they are committed to building missionary-minded, transformational churches among every people, group and community in the world. The global society today is undergoing significant constant proliferation and planting of churches which have brought not only changing values on Christian doctrines, but also greater source of solutions to people's problems. This rapid multiplication of churches is borne out of the understanding that, there is freedom of religious worship. Central to the constant planting and proliferation of churches is the issues of its environmental and religious effects on the people in the society.

In Nigeria, the proliferation of denominational churches is gradually becoming a social problem and this has been linked to a host of factors such as

conflict situations in these churches and to other socio-economic/political factors associated with religious freedom and poor governance. To this Adeboye (2012) continued to opine that, Pentecostal churches are found in all manner of questionable places like ‘in cinema halls, and also in night clubs, hotels, and all such places previously demonized as abodes of sin by classical Pentecostals. (p.152). One apparently covert cause of Pentecostal church proliferation, which has not been critically explored and evaluated, is the role of intra-church conflicts in Pentecostal church proliferation. Conflict has been endemic in Christian religious institutions and the Pentecostal church which is a component is not left out. According to Martins (1986), in some communities, the Pentecostal churches have a bad reputation due to incessant intra-church conflicts.

The unbridled proliferation of Pentecostal churches in the world and particularly in Nigeria has stirred up concerns among adherents of religious faiths, onlookers and academics alike. One area that has not been critically evaluated is the role of intra-church conflicts in Pentecostal church proliferation. Conflict is endemic in religious institutions and the Pentecostal churches; a component is not left out. Most of these conflicts are linked to religious freedom, poor governance and intra-church altercations. Conflict is a situation of disagreements, arguments, clash of interests, loyalties and emotions. It is evident where there are opposing ideas, opinions, feelings, wishes, and beliefs. It is a situation of incompatible goals. Interaction is the bane of conflict. Pentecostal churches involve social human beings and as such not free from conflict. Some anthropological extrapolations were made thereby unraveling causes, reasons for church proliferation, incidences of conflicts and the techniques of conflict resolution. The study accepts religious freedom but argues that unregulated religious freedom fosters and breeds excesses from religious institutions. Therefore, this study is out to examine the issues and prospects of church proliferation.

Conceptual Clarifications

In this section of this research work, the researcher will briefly convey the meaning of the terms that formed the title of the research work. This is to enable the readers to understand the terms and the context in which they are used in the research work.

1. Christianity

Christianity is a monotheistic faith rooted in the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, building upon Abrahamic traditions. It emphasizes faith, love, redemption, and salvation through Jesus, guiding believers' relationships with God and humanity. According McGrath (2017), "Christianity is a monotheistic Abrahamic religion based on the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ" (, p. 12). It emphasizes faith, love, and redemption through Jesus Christ. In a religious context, the word *denomination* is often defined as “a recognized autonomous branch of the Christian church.” One denomination will include many local churches that are usually spread over a broad geographical region. It is a large group of religious congregations united under a common faith and name, usually organized under a single administrative and legal hierarchy.

2. Nigeria

Nigeria, a West African federal republic, boasts rich cultural, linguistic, and ethnic diversity, with over 250 ethnic groups and more than 500 languages spoken. This vibrant nation blends traditional and modern influences, fostering a unique identity. According to Falola & Heaton (2008), "Nigeria is a federal republic located in West Africa, characterized by cultural, linguistic, and ethnic diversity" (p. 1). With over 250 ethnic groups, Nigeria is Africa's most populous country. Nigeria has a diverse geography, with climates ranging from arid to humid equatorial. However, Nigeria's most diverse feature is its people. Hundreds of languages are spoken in the country, including Yoruba, Igbo, Fula, Hausa, Edo, Ibibio, Tiv, and English. The country has abundant natural resources, notably large deposits of petroleum and natural gas. The national capital is Abuja, in the Federal Capital Territory, which

was created by decree in 1976. Lagos, the former capital, retains its standing as the country's leading commercial and industrial city. Modern Nigeria dates from 1914, when the British Protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria were joined. The country became independent on October 1, 1960, and in 1963 adopted a republican constitution but elected to stay a member of the Commonwealth.

3. Double-Edged Sword

A double-edged sword describes a complex situation or phenomenon yielding both advantageous and disadvantageous outcomes, simultaneously presenting benefits and drawbacks, gains and losses or positive and negative consequences, requiring careful consideration and nuanced navigation." Oxford English Dictionary (2020)"A double-edged sword refers to a situation or phenomenon with both beneficial and detrimental consequences" (p. 543). According to Kahneman & Tversky (1979), " Double-edged sword is a situation or circumstance that has both beneficial and detrimental consequences, requiring careful consideration and management to maximize benefits and minimize harm" (p. 265). This metaphor highlights the complexities and trade-offs inherent in many situations.

4. Denominational

Denominational signifies a specific Christian tradition or branch, distinguished by its distinct doctrines, practices, and organizational framework. This classification encompasses various Christian groups, such as Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, and Pentecostal, each with unique characteristics, beliefs, and worship styles. Denominations often emerge from theological, historical, or cultural differences, shaping Christian diversity and expression. According to Niebuhr (1929) "Denominational refers to a distinct branch or tradition within Christianity, characterized by unique doctrines, practices, and organizational structures" (, p. 19). Denominations often reflect theological, cultural, or historical differences.

5. Proliferation

Proliferation describes the swift expansion or multiplication of entities, ideas, or phenomena, resulting in heightened diversity, complexity, and often, unpredictability. This rapid growth can manifest in various contexts, such as: cellular proliferation in biology, ideological proliferation in sociology, technological proliferation in innovation and denominational proliferation in religion. It is characterized by exponential increase, proliferation can lead to: enhanced adaptability, increased competition, diversified perspectives, complex systems and emergence of new forms. Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2020) defines proliferation as, "Proliferation refers to the rapid growth or multiplication of something, often leading to increased diversity and complexity" (p. 981). In the context of denominationalism, proliferation signifies the emergence of new denominations.

The Double-Edged Sword of Denominational Proliferation

Double-Edged Sword of Denominational Proliferation simply means that proliferation of denominations in Nigeria has two sides as; positive and negative impacts. Denominational proliferation in Nigeria sparks debate, yielding mixed outcomes. While fostering evangelism, diversity, and church growth. It also fuels division, competition, and commercialization, underscoring the need for ecumenical cooperation and contextual relevance. According to Kalu (2008), denominational proliferation in Nigeria has been a contentious issue, with both positive and negative consequences (p.123). Bosch (1991) said, on one hand, it has led to increased evangelism and church growth. (p.456). Hanciles (2008) opined that; the proliferation of denominations has also provided Nigerians with diverse worship options, catering to individual preferences (p.187). However, Gatu (2006) said, denominational proliferation has also resulted in division, competition, and conflict among churches (p.211). This fragmentation has weakened the Christian voice in Nigeria, hindering collective action on social issues (p.145). Furthermore, Kessler (2010) said, the proliferation of denominations has led to the commercialization of Christianity, with some churches prioritizing financial gain over spiritual growth.

Research has shown that denominational proliferation is influenced by factors such as globalization, urbanization, and cultural identity. Bevans (2002) said, to mitigate the negative consequences, Nigerian churches must prioritize ecumenical cooperation and contextualize their message to address local needs (p.123). Denominational proliferation in Nigeria is a complex phenomenon with both benefits and drawbacks. To harness its potential, churches must strive for unity, contextual relevance, and spiritual integrity.

Positive Impacts of Denominational Proliferation

There are positive impacts of denominational proliferation in as much as there are negatives impacts. The researcher will first review the positive aspects, before reviewing the negative aspects.

1. Spiritual Growth

Denominational proliferation boosts evangelism and missionary efforts, expanding Christianity's reach. New churches and denominations mobilize resources, energize believers, and tailor messaging to local needs, sparking spiritual renewal and growth. This proliferation fosters diverse worship styles, innovative outreach, and community engagement, further spreading the Christian message. According to Bosch (1991): "Denominational proliferation has led to increased evangelism and missionary work." (p. 456). Kalu (2008) said: "Proliferation has facilitated spiritual renewal and revival." (p.123). Hanciles (2008) opined: "Diversity in worship styles and expressions has enriched Nigerian Christianity." (p. 187). Nigerian Christianity flourishes through diverse worship styles and expressions. Vibrant denominations offer unique perspectives, fostering spiritual growth and community engagement. Dynamic music, art, and liturgy enrich worship experiences, attracting diverse followers and revitalizing faith. This rich tapestry strengthens Nigerian Christianity, promoting unity amidst diversity.

2. Church Growth

Denominational proliferation has significantly broadened Christian presence in Nigeria. New churches and denominations have sprouted, increasing accessibility

and visibility. This expansion has reached rural areas, urban centers, and diverse demographics, making Christianity more relatable and accessible to Nigerians, and fostering a stronger national Christian identity According to Gatu (2006,): "Denominational proliferation has expanded Christian presence in Nigeria." (p.211). In the words of Adeyemo (2008): "New denominations have addressed emerging social issues." (p. 167). Lastly. Ter Haar (2009,): "Proliferation has led to innovative approaches to ministry and outreach." (p.201). Denominational proliferation has sparked creative ministry and outreach strategies in Nigeria. Innovative churches leverage technology, arts, and community engagement to reach diverse audiences. Fresh expressions of worship, outreach programs, and social initiatives emerge, revitalizing Christian impact and appealing to a new generation of Nigerians.

3. Innovation and Adaptation

Denominational growth in Nigeria fuels community transformation. Churches establish schools, hospitals, and social programs, uplifting vulnerable populations. Community development initiatives focus on education, healthcare, and economic empowerment, demonstrating Christianity's positive impact and fostering holistic growth, from spiritual nurture to socioeconomic advancement. According to Bevans (2002,): "Contextualized messaging has addressed local needs." (p.123). Also, Kessler (2010) said: "Healthy competition among denominations promotes accountability." (p. 145). In the same vein, Lubeck (2012): "Denominational proliferation has facilitated community development initiatives." (p. 156). Contextualized messaging tailors the gospel to Nigeria's unique challenges. Local churches address pressing issues like poverty, corruption, and social injustice, offering hope and practical solutions. Relevant teaching and outreach programs resonate with Nigerians, making Christianity more relatable and transformative in everyday life.

4. Social Impact

Christian organizations revolutionize education and healthcare in Nigeria. Quality schools, hospitals, and clinics provide vital services, uplifting communities.

Compassionate care, vocational training, and health initiatives empower marginalized groups, demonstrating Christianity's transformative power and commitment to holistic well-being. According to Ojo (2006): "Christian organizations have improved education and healthcare." (p.234). Olupona (2011): "Denominational proliferation has promoted peace and conflict resolution." (p.187). Ukah (2013): "Proliferation has facilitated social justice programs." (p. 123). Denominational growth fuels social justice initiatives in Nigeria. Churches tackle poverty, inequality, and human rights, advocating for the vulnerable. Programs focus on education, economic empowerment, and community development, promoting equality, justice, and compassion, and embodying Christian values in tangible, life-changing ways.

5. Ecumenical Cooperation

Denominational diversity sparks unity in Nigeria. Interdenominational dialogue and collaboration flourish, fostering mutual understanding and respect. Churches join forces to address social issues, promote peace, and advance the gospel, demonstrating Christianity's strength in diversity and shared purpose. According to Bevans (2002,): "Interdenominational dialogue and collaboration have increased." (p.145). Gatu (2006,): "Shared resources and expertise have benefited Nigerian Christianity." (p.216). Kalu (2008,): "United Christian voice on social issues has strengthened." (p.130). A united Christian voice amplifies social impact in Nigeria. Denominations unite to address critical issues like poverty, corruption, and injustice. Collective advocacy inspires change, promotes moral values, and safeguards human rights, demonstrating Christianity's transformative power and commitment to the common good.

Negative Impacts of Denominational Proliferation

1. Theological and Doctrinal Impacts

Denominational proliferation spawns theological fragmentation, fueling confusion and division. Diverse interpretations dilute doctrine, causing believers to question core teachings. This fragmentation hinders unity, undermines credibility,

and obscures Christianity's central message, ultimately impairing effective witness and discipleship. According to McGrath (2004), "Theological fragmentation and diversity, leading to confusion (p. 23). Wright (2006) said, "Doctrinal divisions and disagreements. (p.45). While MacArthur (1988) opined that proliferation of Christian denominations has; "Watered-down or compromised theology. (p.15). Lastly, Packer (1995), "Loss of biblical authority and centrality. (p.12). Denominationalism fosters doctrinal divisions, sparking disagreements and disputes. Competing theological views create rifts, hindering collaboration and weakening Christian unity. This fragmentation: undermines biblical authority, fosters theological relativism, distracts from mission and ministry, erodes trust among believers and obscures Christianity's core message.

2. Unity and Cooperation Impacts

Denominational proliferation breeds disunity, fragmenting Christians into isolated groups. This disunity: weakens collective witness, hinders evangelistic efforts, fosters competition over cooperation, distracts from shared mission and undermines credibility. A divided Church struggles to demonstrate unity, love, and compassion, compromising its effectiveness in a fragmented world." According to Rucyahana (2007), "Disunity and fragmentation among Christians." (p.90). Sanneh (2003) said, "Competition and rivalry among denominations." (p.120). Jenkins (2002) said, "Duplication of efforts and resources." (p.187). Lastly, Tennent, (2010), "Decreased cooperation and collaboration". (p.145). Denominational proliferation fuels competition and rivalry, diverting focus from gospel centrality. Churches and denominations: vie for members and resources, prioritize institutional survival over mission, emphasize distinctive over shared faith and foster exclusivity rather than unity. This competitive landscape undermines collaborative ministry and dilutes Christianity's transformative power."

3. Social and Cultural Impacts

Denominational proliferation can: reinforce tribalism, segregating believers along ethnic/cultural lines, perpetuate ethnocentrism, prioritizing one's own culture

over others, lead to cultural captivity and conflating faith with cultural norms. This fragmentation hinders gospel transcendence, limiting Christianity's transformative power across diverse cultures and communities." According to Katongole (2011) negative impact of denominational proliferation can, "Contributes to tribalism, ethnocentrism, and cultural captivity (p.56). Rah (2009) said, "Reinforces social and economic divisions" (p.82). Yong, 2005), "Fosters exclusivism and isolationism." (p.130). Lastly, Volf (1996) said, "Undermines Christian witness and credibility." (p.102). Denominational proliferation can: perpetuate social stratification, segregating believers by socioeconomic status, reinforce economic disparities, favoring affluent communities, obstruct cross-cultural and cross-socioeconomic ministry and limit gospel impact, confining it to specific social echelons. A fragmented Church struggles to bridge social and economic divides."

4. Practical and Missional Impacts

Denominational fragmentation leads to inefficient resource allocation: duplication of efforts and infrastructure, overlapping administrative costs and inadequate resource sharing. A unified approach optimizes resources for maximum kingdom impact." According to Warren (1995), "Inefficient use of resources" (p.67). Graham (1975) said that negative impact of denominational proliferation can, "Decreased evangelistic effectiveness. (p.145). Guinness (2003) said that negative impact of denominational proliferation can result in, "Weakened Christian influence in society." (p.56). Sider (2005) opined its, "Difficulty in addressing social issues collectively." (p.120). Denominational proliferation hinders evangelistic effectiveness: duplicates efforts, wasting resources, creates confusion among unbelievers, distracts from gospel centrality, fosters competition over cooperation and dilutes Christian witness. A fragmented Church struggles to convey a unified message, undermining its credibility and impact."

5. Institutional and Administrative Impacts

Denominational fragmentation spawns bureaucratic complexity like: redundant administrative systems, overlapping governance structures, increased

regulatory burdens, decreased agility and adaptability and higher operational costs. Streamlined structures and collaboration can optimize resources for mission-driven impact. According to Oden (2006) it leads to, “Proliferation of bureaucratic structures (p.78). Gerstner, 1992) Increased administrative costs (p. 56). Wells (1993) said that it leads to; “Overemphasis on institutional maintenance.” (p.102). Stetzer (2006) opined that results in, “Decreased focus on mission and ministry.” (p.150). Denominational fragmentation prioritizes institutional preservation like: overemphasizing self-preservation over mission, focusing on internal needs over external impact, protecting traditions over innovation, maintaining structures over nurturing people and ensuring institutional survival over advancing the gospel. A missional focus prioritizes people over institutions

6. Personal and Spiritual Impacts

Denominational fragmentation can diminish focus on personal holiness as follow: overemphasizing doctrine over discipleship, prioritizing institutional growth over individual transformation, neglecting spiritual disciplines, fostering complacency and separating faith from daily life A renewed emphasis on holiness revives spiritual vitality. According to Schaeffer (1975) opined thus; “Confusion and disillusionment among believers (p.90). Peterson (2008) said it leads to, “Spiritual shallowness and consumerism.” (p. 5). Willard (1998) is of the opinion that it results in, “Lack of accountability and discipleship.” (p.120). Wesley (1777) said, “It decreased emphasis on personal holiness (p.56). Denominational fragmentation often leads to: lack of accountability among leaders, inadequate discipleship programs, insufficient spiritual guidance, and neglect of biblical standards and decreased emphasis on personal growth. A culture of accountability and discipleship fosters spiritual maturity and effective leadership.

Materialism as a Driven Force to Proliferation of Denominations

Here are views on materialism as a driven force to proliferation of Christian denominations in Nigeria:

1. Theological Perspectives

Materialism propels denominationalism by transforming faith into a consumer product, fostering a marketplace of religious ideas where spiritual seekers shop for tailored experiences, and churches compete for members, resources, and influence, ultimately fragmenting Christianity into diverse, market-driven denominations. According to Marty (1997), "The Protestant Voice in American Pluralism: Materialism fuels denominationalism by creating a marketplace for religious ideas." (p.123). Cimino and Lattin (1998) said, "Selling Jesus: What's Behind the Commercialization of Christianity" (p.120). Commercialization drives denominational proliferation. Cox (2016) "The Market as God: How Capitalism Became the New Religion" (p.78). Pursuit of wealth and status drives denominationalism. The relentless pursuit of wealth and status fuels denominationalism, as churches prioritize growth, prosperity, and influence over spiritual unity. This idolization of material success fragments Christianity, creating a marketplace of competing values and interests that undermine the unity of the Body of Christ."

2. Sociological Analysis

Materialism corrodes religious devotion, breeding individualism and consumerism. As believers prioritize possessions and personal interests, communal faith wanes, and churches become market-driven, catering to individual desires. This shift undermines shared values, spiritual accountability, and collective purpose, fragmenting Christianity into self-focused, consumerist denominations. According to Wuthnow (1998) said, "After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s, materialism erodes religious commitment, leading to individualism and consumerism " (p.156). Houston (2010), "Materialism and Denominationalism" (p. 567-583). Materialism's impact on denominational proliferation. Materialism fuels denominational proliferation by commodifying faith, fostering individualism, and

prioritizing wealth and status, leading to fragmented Christianity, shallow commitment, and missed mission."

3. Philosophical Reflections

Commodification of faith fuels denominational proliferation, transforming churches into market-driven entities competing for consumers. This commodification prioritizes individual desires over communal unity, fragmenting Christianity into specialized brands, and reducing spiritual commitment to consumer choice, ultimately eroding the integrity of the Gospel. According to Tanner (2005), "The Commodification of Christianity contributes to denominational proliferation" (p.291-311). Johnston (2014,) said, "The Wealth of Nations and the Bible" (p. 145). Economic interests drive denominationalism. Economic interests fuel denominationalism, transforming faith into a market-driven force. Churches compete for resources, members, and influence, prioritizing financial sustainability over spiritual unity, and fragmenting Christianity into specialized brands.

Colonial Impact on Denominational Proliferation in Nigeria

Colonialism introduced Christianity to Nigeria, leading to denominational diversity. European missionaries competed for converts, creating divisions. Colonial policies and missionary rivalries fueled fragmentation. Nigeria's ethnic and linguistic diversity led to denominationally-aligned churches. Traditional African religions blended with Christianity, producing indigenous denominations. Urbanization, education, and economic development created new social classes, forming denominations catering to specific interests. Post-colonial independence saw Nigerians break away from European control, establishing indigenous churches. Today, Nigeria has numerous denominations, including Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Pentecostal, and indigenous churches like the African Church and Cherubim and Seraphim. According to Ojo (2006), argues that colonialism created an environment conducive to denominationalism by introducing competing European missionary groups. While, Ayegboyin (2015), examines how missionary competition and colonial policies contributed to denominationalism. Missionary

competition and colonial policies fueled denominationalism in Nigeria. Rival European missionary groups competed for converts, creating divisions. Colonial policies segregated Christians by ethnicity and language, leading to denominationally-aligned churches. Missionaries' differing theologies and practices further fragmented Christianity. This competition and segregation spawned numerous denominations, shaping Nigeria's diverse Christian landscape. Falola (2018) discusses how colonialism transformed Nigerian Christianity, leading to denominational proliferation. Colonialism transformed Nigerian Christianity, fueling denominational proliferation through:

- i. Introduction of European Christianity, displacing traditional beliefs.
- ii. Competition among missionary groups (Catholics, Protestants, Anglicans).
- iii. Imposition of Western theological and liturgical practices.
- iv. Segregation by ethnicity and language.
- v. Creation of missionary-controlled schools and hospitals.
- vi. Disruption of traditional African spirituality.
- vii. Emergence of indigenous churches and denominations.
- viii. Post-colonial independence, leading to Nigerian-led denominations.

This transformation resulted in:

- i. Over 1,000 Christian denominations in Nigeria.
- ii. Diverse theological and doctrinal perspectives.
- iii. Ethnic and linguistic alignment with specific denominations.
- iv. Tensions between traditional and modern Christian practices.
- v. Dynamic, ever-evolving Nigerian Christian landscape.

Thereby reshaping Nigeria's Christian landscape. Here's a summary: Colonialism transformed Nigerian Christianity, also leading to denominational proliferation. Korieh (2017), explores the historical context of colonialism and its impact on Nigerian Christianity. Olupona (2017), discusses how colonialism disrupted traditional African spirituality, paving the way for Pentecostalism and denominationalism. Colonialism disrupted traditional African spirituality by

imposing Western Christianity, suppressing indigenous practices, and demonizing ancestral beliefs. This created a spiritual vacuum, leading to cultural disorientation. As Nigerians sought to reconnect with their heritage, Pentecostalism's emphasis on spiritual experience and empowerment resonated. Its message of salvation, healing, and prosperity appealed to those seeking answers. Denominationalism flourished as Nigerian leaders emerged, blending Pentecostalism with traditional practices. This syncretism resulted in diverse, dynamic denominations, transforming Nigeria's religious landscape. Colonialism's legacy of cultural disruption and spiritual fragmentation paved the way for Pentecostalism's explosive growth and denominational proliferation in Nigeria. Ibhawoh (2011), analyzes theological differences between Baptist and Pentecostal denominations, tracing them to colonial-era missionary activities. Adogame (2014) explores how colonialism influenced Nigerian culture and contributed to denominationalism. Colonialism influenced Nigerian culture by:

- i. Imposing Western values and Christianity on Nigeria culture
- ii. Suppressing indigenous practices and traditions
- iii. Creating ethnic and linguistic divisions
- iv. Fostering cultural identity crisis

This led to denominationalism as Nigerians blended traditional beliefs with Christianity, forming diverse denominations, and seeking cultural and spiritual relevance, identity, and expression.

8. Strengthening Christian Presence in Nigeria

Indigenous leadership and contextualized theology strengthen Christian presence in Nigeria by: empowering local leaders to address cultural needs, integrating African perspectives into biblical teachings, reconciling traditional values with Christian faith, promoting culturally relevant worship and practices, addressing social issues through African Christian lens and enhancing authenticity and ownership. This approach fosters a vibrant, inclusive, and impactful Nigerian Christianity. Mbiti (1969), “Emphasizes indigenous leadership and contextualized

theology.” (p.257). Furthermore, Mbiti (1976), Advocates for African-owned and-led Christian initiatives. (p.123). African-led Christian initiatives empower Nigeria's faith community through: Self-sustaining ministries, local leadership and ownership, contextualized theology, culturally relevant evangelism, indigenous discipleship, authentic African expression, homegrown solutions and community-driven impact. Fostering a vibrant, self-sufficient, and impactful Nigerian Christianity, rooted in African values and perspectives.

Idowu (1965), Stresses the importance of social justice and community engagement. Reflecting Christ's love through transformative action." (p.187). Social justice and community engagement strengthen Nigeria's Christian presence through: serving the poor, advocating for equality, promoting peace, addressing inequality and empowering marginalized communities. Also Idowu (1974), Calls for Christian unity and cooperation among denominations. (p. 145). Calls for Christian unity and cooperation among denominations are crucial for strengthening Christian presence in Nigeria. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) has been a key player in promoting unity and cooperation among various Christian denominations since its formation in 1976. Key Initiatives for Unity and Cooperation:

- i. Ecumenical Dialogue: Theological discussions between different Christian denominations to understand each other's perspectives and find common ground.
- ii. Joint Missionary Efforts: Collaborative evangelism and mission projects to spread the gospel and serve communities.
- iii. Social Justice and Community Engagement: Working together to address social issues, promote peace, and provide humanitarian aid.
- iv. Leadership Development: Empowering local leaders and promoting indigenous leadership to drive Christian growth and unity.

Success Stories:

The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) and the Catholic Church have made significant strides in ecumenical cooperation through the Anglican-Roman

Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) ¹. This partnership has led to greater understanding and collaboration on issues like Eucharist, Ministry, and Authority.

Challenges and Opportunities:

Despite progress, challenges persist, including historical divisions, cultural differences, and competing interests. However, these challenges also present opportunities for growth, learning, and deeper unity among Nigerian Christians. By embracing unity and cooperation, Nigerian Christians can strengthen their presence, impact their communities and fulfill the Great Commission.

According to Turaki (1999), Highlights the need for Christian education and leadership development (p. 217). Christian education and leadership development are crucial for strengthening Nigeria's Christian presence. This involves:

- i. Equipping pastors and leaders with biblical knowledge
- ii. Developing contextualized curriculum
- iii. Empowering youth and women leaders
- iv. Fostering spiritual growth and discipleship
- v. Enhancing evangelism and mission
- vi. Promoting integrity and accountability

Transforming lives, churches, and communities through informed, inspired, and effective leadership." To preceded view, Turaki (2004) furthered to emphasize the role of the church in promoting social transformation. (p.187). While, Ayegboyin (2005), Advocates for a contextualized approach to Christian worship and liturgy (p.153). A contextualized approach to Christian worship and liturgy strengthens Nigeria's Christian presence by:

- i. Incorporating African rhythms and instrument
- ii. Using local languages and idioms
- iii. Integrating cultural symbols and imagery
- iv. Reflecting Nigerian experiences and struggles
- v. Empowering indigenous worship leaders
- vi. Fostering inclusive and vibrant congregations

Authentic, relevant worship ignites spiritual passion, unity, and mission. Ayegboyin (2011) furthered to call for greater emphasis on Christian ethics and moral values (p. 219). Christian ethics and moral values strengthen Nigeria's Christian presence through: integrity, honesty, transparency, compassion, justice, equality, forgiveness, reconciliation, peace, accountability, humility, servant-leadership, transforming lives, communities and society. According to Katongole (2007) emphasizes the importance of Christian witness and mission as a tool to fostering unit and cooperation in Nigeria Christianity. (p.193). Katongole (2007) also said, calls for a renewed focus on Christian unity and cooperation. (p. 167). As a way to strengthening Nigeria Christianity.

9. Conclusion

Christianity in Nigeria: The Double-Edged Sword of Denominational Proliferation. ACCORDING TO Pew Research Center (2020). Nigeria, with its estimated 85 million Christians, is home to one of the largest Christian populations in Africa. However, the proliferation of denominations in Nigeria has created a complex and multifaceted landscape, yielding both positive and negative consequences. In searching for a way forward the researcher came up with the ideas of these scholars; Ecumenical Cooperation: According to Katongole (2011) suggested, Fostering of dialogue and collaboration among denominations to promote unity and shared mission (p. 193). Theological Education: Ayegboyin (2005), strengthen biblical training and accountability among leaders to ensure theological integrity. (p.153). Contextualized Christianity: Mbiti (1976) said, encourage indigenous leadership and culturally relevant expressions of Christianity, while maintaining core teachings (p. 123). In conclusion, denominational proliferation in Nigeria presents a double-edged sword. While it has contributed to increased evangelism and diversity, it also poses significant challenges to unity, theology, and financial accountability. Addressing these concerns through ecumenical cooperation, theological education, and contextualized Christianity will strengthen Nigerian Christianity, ensuring a vibrant and impactful presence.

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