

Pentecostalism in the Context of Nigeria: The Historical Origin, Antecedents, and Development of Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria

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Received: January 21, 2025 Accepted: March 14, 2025 Published: March 25, 2025

doi:10.5296/ijssr.v13i1.22745 URL: <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijssr.v13i1.22745>

Abstract

The close affinity of Nigerian Pentecostalism with its unique historical origin and nature gave rise to a fast-growing number of Nigerian Pentecostal churches that emerged from the late 1990s to date, resulting in its peculiar growth patterns. Arising from a convergence of factors that include local religious practices, Christian missionary practices, and a series of early charismatic revival movements and personalities, Nigerian Pentecostalism rapidly developed in the 20th century with key influences of early charismatic Christian activities generated from Sub-Saharan West Africa and advanced from the West. The main objective of this article is to provide an understanding of the connection of the Nigerian Pentecostal churches to their historical root and the reasons for the contributions, intricacies, and challenges surrounding their prominent and influential involvement in society today. A descriptive and analytical method of explorative research was utilized with data collected from published and unpublished materials, statements, and other available literature between the 19th and 21st centuries as research tools for this study. The study concludes that Pentecostal churches in Nigeria did not just spring from thin air but have a unique historical origin, personalities, events, characteristics, and attitude to life, propelling their growth, expansion, and prominence in and outside Nigeria. The implication therefore from this study is that it influences discourse on historical knowledge, theological and social understanding, and policy-making efforts, and it bridges the gap by providing a more accurate picture of the origins, events, prominent figures, and personalities.

Keywords: African Initiated Churches, Historical Origin and Root, Missionary churches, Pentecostalism, Nigerian Pentecostal Churches

1. Introduction

Nigeria has a peculiar history of Pentecostalism, a Christian religious movement that has led to the rise of several fast-growing Pentecostal churches in the country. Not only is this unique Christian experience consistently causing a wave of unprecedented growth and expansion that can be linked to its historical antecedents, but it is also making huge impacts on social and religious strata in society as people's socio-economic, political, and spiritual lives are being influenced recurrently. A close look at the history of Nigerian Pentecostal churches shows that their antecedents, growth, and development have been crystalized and preserved over the years, particularly since the early 1980s and more so from the late 1990s. This article therefore explores and analyses the historical roots and background of the Pentecostal movement with its increasing influence and impact as a force of significance from its onset till the current wave of Pentecostalism in Nigeria. Beginning with the arrival of Christianity in Nigeria, the study is explored through three steps. First, it traces the origin, development, issues, events, activities, and the precursors or personalities that inspired the emergence of the Pentecostal brand of Christianity. Secondly, it examines and reveals the relevance of historical factors in their own time while assessing the contemporary significance of church growth and development. Thirdly, it looks at some of the difficulties that were faced by the early missionaries thus making their task particularly challenging. With these in mind, the Pre-Pentecostal Period will be examined along with the era of Missionary Churches and their understanding of African culture, followed by the era of African Initiated Churches and their character. The study concludes with the effects and the implications drawn, followed by some recommendations that may be helpful.

The central argument of this article is that the connection of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria to their historical origin and character has caused them to become a dominant force and influential entities in responding to the socio-economic realities that are appealing to a broad range of people in and outside Nigeria. As a result, understanding the history and reasons for their contributions, challenges, and intricacies of their involvement in society from the times they emerged until contemporary times, is significant for providing insight and understanding of their growth and influence locally and globally. Intentional boundaries were set as parameters for the explorative study in this article. Firstly, the scope is limited to Nigeria, focusing only on Nigerian Pentecostal churches as a denomination, excluding the vast global Pentecostal movement and other Christian church denominations. Secondly, the study covers only the historical perspectives and doctrinal evolution and developments of Pentecostalism from the middle 19th century to the present in Nigeria.

The methodology applied for this study is an explorative design through a descriptive and analytical method. Applying this methodology enabled the usage of a significant body of primary and secondary data assembled from existing published materials that were systematically examined through a descriptive and explanatory process with an extensive survey of scholarly books, articles, and other relevant sources. The methodology also involved critically evaluating all the materials, information, facts, claims, and theories relating to the study. Doing a thorough examination of the historical origin and antecedents of Pentecostalism in Nigeria is necessary to assist in having a clearer understanding of why, and

how Nigerian Pentecostal Churches are expanding and becoming increasingly effective in their engagement and contributions to society both locally and internationally.

2. History and Background of Nigeria

To better understand and appreciate the history of Pentecostalism in Nigeria, it is necessary to briefly provide an overview of Nigeria as a nation as well as the history of Nigeria before giving a historical overview of Pentecostalism in Nigeria.

2.1 Brief Statistical Overview of Nigeria and Its Implications

Nigeria, a nation of almost 237.5 million people in 2025, is located within a total land area of 910,770 km² in the Western region of Africa called the Gulf of Guinea and bounded by four countries which are Benin, Cameroon, Niger, and Chad (Worldometer, 2025). In the 2025 list of countries and dependencies by world population, Nigeria is ranked 6th out of an estimated 8.2 billion people worldwide (Worldometer, 2025), a climb from its 7th ranking out of 7.6 billion people in 2018. Nigeria's population density is 261 per km² and its urban population is 54.9 % (Worldometer, 2025). The median age in the Nigerian nation is 18.1 years, with over 90 million of its population under age 18 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2015; Library of Congress, 2008). Nigeria has 774 Local Government areas spread over 36 states with its capital, Abuja in the centre of Nigeria and geographically located within the Northern region of the country (Cybriwsky, 2013).

Although Nigeria is a country with over 250 ethnic groups and over 500 indigenous languages (Blench, 2012; CIFORB, 2016), the official language of the country is English. It also has Nigerian Pidgin English language as a second language spoken by some Nigerians mainly in urban areas of the country (Grimes & Grimes, 1996; Mann, 2009; Izenose, 2018) that bridges regions and language groups. The estimated number of Pidgin English speakers in Nigeria is between three to five million by those who use it as a first language and about 75 million by those who use it as a second language (BBC News, 2016; The Conversation, 2018; Emike et al., 2019; David & Francis, 2019).

The availability of relevant and reliable statistical data is vital in research. However, this has been a challenge for Nigeria since 1960 when it gained independence because of the absence of adequate facts, poor record keeping, difficulty in obtaining them, and inaccuracy where available (Ogunfowora, 1993; Morgan, 2008; Ammani et al., 2010; Ammani, 2011; Stolper, 2013). Ammani (2011, p. 97) explains:

Over the years, development scholars have questioned the availability and reliability of Nigerian-published statistical data. First, is the absence of solid data necessary for the country's development planning since the nation's independence (Stolper, 1966). Secondly, there is difficulty experienced in obtaining adequate data due to insufficient record keeping (Ogunfowora, 1993). Third is the doubt cast on the accuracy of the existing data (Morgan, 2008). Accordingly, the efforts to collect data, the accessibility, and the reliability of the data are shrouded with uncertainty.

He adds that "economic literature tends to insinuate that the more underdeveloped a country

the less the accuracy of the data it published” (p. 97).

While progressing with this study, it is essential to explain that the Nigerian population figure of 195.9 million has been selected for this study even though it is an estimate that may not accurately reflect the correct figure bearing in mind that other sources’ estimates are different. For example, the CIA World Factbook (2018) estimates the Nigerian total population to be 203,452,505 as of July 2018, distinct from the 200,000,000 data in the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2015 report. Obtaining explicit figures from the National Population Commission (NPC) of Nigeria is difficult because the last time the NPC conducted a census was in 2006 making it out of date since ideally, censuses should be conducted at least every 10 years. Overcoming this situation is like any other aspect of the nation and people of Nigeria which are beset with challenges affecting policy planning and other areas of national development including being plagued by political interference from design to implementation (Obono & Omoluabi, 2014). This makes it difficult to have accurate data on this and other relevant population data like age, gender, and even religious data which will be discussed in a subsequent paragraph of this subsection. These parameters have not changed because as in “most post-independence censuses before it, there were motivation and opportunities for manipulating the Census figures” (Obono & Omoluabi, 2014).

Due to the above-listed reasons, this study relied mainly on external bodies such as Worldbank (2018); Worldometers (2025); and others referred to in previous paragraphs to determine the Nigerian population data. This is because, as a nation, Nigeria does not have authentic official statistics about its population size. It is therefore not surprising that there are some disparities in the data. For instance, the Central Intelligence Agency (2015) reports that the Nigerian population is made up of 50% Muslims, 40% Christians, and 10% indigenous beliefs as against Johnstone et al. (2001) which indicates it to be 51.3% Christian population and 45.1% Muslims. The different conflicting statistics on Nigeria are based on many factors such as the sensitivity of religion amongst Nigerians and how it is often used as a tool for political manipulation. As a result, for many years it was a challenge to include data on religion during census periods in Nigeria. This unfortunately is so because previous population censuses in the country have repeatedly culminated in controversies. For instance, the 1991 census, which was applauded and considered the best at that time, still led to over 100 cases filed in courts throughout the country. Part of the reason for this is the misconceived view and manipulative practice of using census figures as weapons of control and power on revenue allocation and religious, political, and ethnic representation (Sunday, 2016). The increasing exploitation of the religious, ethnic, and political terrain in Nigeria and the struggle for resource distribution and control being propelled by self-centered interests continued to contribute to the dilemma of insecurity and mismanagement of funds and resources in Nigeria (Mohammed et al., 2019).

The 2018 Centre for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Cornwell Theological Seminary survey shows that over 631 million Christians resided in the African continent and that Christians comprised 45% of the African population (Gordon-Conwell Centre, 2018). Before the 2018 report of the Gordon-Conwell Centre, the Pew Research Centre report had

revealed earlier that Nigeria was a country with the largest population of Christians compared to any African country (Skirbekk et al., 2011) out of the over 516 million Christians in existence in sub-Saharan Africa as of 2011. Also, within the 51 countries and territories that make up Sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria's Christian population accounts for an estimated figure of over 80,510,000 million people. This makes it about 6.4% of the African continent's total population and 3.7% of the World Christian population as of 2011 (Skirbekk et al., 2011). A look at the overall population size, Christian population size, and demographic pattern reveals that Nigeria in effect has the highest number of Christians in the 16 countries and 1 territory that make up the West African south of the Sahara (Pattillo et al., 2001).

2.2 About the State of Affairs in Nigeria

Nigeria obtained independence from its former British colonial master on October 1st, 1960, and became a republic in 1963 (Diamond, 1988; Ogunremi & Faluyi, 1996; Library of Congress, 2008). Nigeria is often called the Giant of Africa not only because of its population size, as described earlier, but also because of its large economy regarding which some have recognized the nation as the financial, diplomatic, and economic hub of the region (Akindele, 2003; Diop et al., 2014; Nwagwu & Oni, 2015). This is so because Nigeria is a nation with rich human capital and large natural resources including being one of the leading producers of the world's crude oil (Thomas, 1995). Regarded as one of the emerging economies of the world (Phillips & Moutinho, 2017; O'Neill, 2014), it is noteworthy that the presence and activities of Christianity, particularly that of the Pentecostal churches in Nigeria are indicative of the social and economic challenges in the region (Akindele, 2003; Adebajo, 2006). However, Nigeria has not been able to translate this wealth capacity into a high standard of living as many of its citizens still live below the poverty line. The current provision of education, infrastructural development, health care, and access to good social and economic opportunities is not commensurate with its high population growth rate.

The period of military rule between 1966 and 1999 was inundated with the obvious failure of many successive governments. The period which witnessed about six successful military coup d'états, about three unsuccessful attempts to overthrow military regimes, and three democratically elected governments that were overturned [except for a brief interval of democratic rule from 1979 to 1983] was a period that undermined Nigeria's standing amongst other nations (Ukah, 2003). The dissatisfaction and instability caused by all the difficult situations was one of the reasons for the frequent coups in Nigeria between 1966 and 1999. It should however be noted that ironically, Nigeria had a double-edged situation in which it was not only the military rule that contributed to the difficult political and socio-economic situation but also the mismanagement of resources by the civilian governments that resulted in the poor socio-economic conditions of the people (Adeshina, 1999). The economic impact of military rule was so disastrous that Nigeria's traditional agriculturally based economy was neglected to the point that Nigeria became hugely dependent on crude oil exports which led to an unstable economy due to frequent fluctuations in prices (Siollun, 2009). There was flagrant abuse of power, gross incompetence, misplaced priorities, mismanagement, and waste of public resources (Ihonvbere, 1996). All these resulted in Nigerians being dissatisfied as they experienced increased poverty, crime, disease, and illnesses; social, economic, and

business decline; urban dislocation, instability, and institutional decay (Ihonvbere, 1996). This and many more challenges often ended in disillusionment and disappointment of the people such that the number of Nigerians turning to religiosity and spirituality kept increasing over the decades (Okeke & Wheto, 2011). This rapidly intensified the expression that many Nigerians found in going beyond the existing mainline churches to the new spiritual phenomenon that Pentecostal churches offered Nigerians as they began to spring up.

Nigeria is a highly religious nation of people who are fanatical about their religion even though its history has been riddled with very difficult economic and political periods, particularly between 1966 to 1999 (Ukah, 2003). Shaped by its history of religious conversions, the rest of Nigeria's population is shared by Islam and traditional religions with more Christians located in the Southern region and more Muslims in the Northern region (CIA, 2015). Nigeria has a variety of religions which are mostly regional as can be seen in the 2016 Commonwealth Initiative for Freedom of Religion or Belief (CIFORB). The CIFORB profile states that "the majority of Nigerians are (mostly Sunni) Muslims or (mostly Protestant) Christians with estimates varying about which religion is larger. There is a significant number of adherents of other religions, including indigenous animistic religions" (CIFORB, 2016, p. 1). The profile also states:

The vast majority of the population of northern Nigeria identifies as Muslim and is primarily from the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group. In southwest Nigeria, which has large Christian and Muslim populations, the Yoruba is the largest ethnic group. Southeast Nigeria is largely Christian and is dominated by the Igbo ethnic group. The 'Middle Belt' in central Nigeria is home to numerous smaller ethnic groups that are predominantly Christian, but with a significant Muslim population (CIFORB, 2016, p. 1).

The CIFORB statements above reveal part of the reason for the polarized nature of Nigeria in terms of ethnicity and religion being a source of many crises of conflicts and violence with over 400 ethnic groups, dispersed amongst Christianity and Islam, the two major religions in Nigeria. Salawu (2010, p. 345) reveals that it is "because of the violent nature of ethno-religious conflicts, which often take the form of riots, sabotage, assassination, armed struggles, guerilla warfare and secession in Nigeria, they no doubt have implications for the political and economic development of the country." Such conflicts gave rise to ethnic-militia groups like the Bakassi Boys, O'dua People Congress (OPC), Igbo People Congress (IPC), Arewa People's Congress (APC), and many others to enforce the agenda of ethnic and religious desires which caused further ethno-religious intolerance, divides, and disastrous consequences. These crises which have continued over the years often impair various repeated efforts at national stability and cohesion, democratization, and social and economic transformation thereby affecting the economic and political development of Nigeria. (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005; Eghosa & Rotimi, 2005; Salawu, 2010). These challenges have no doubt created the gap which is being filled by services provided through Christian churches and organizations, particularly Pentecostal churches, and organizations.

3. Origin and Historical Overview of the Development of Pentecostalism in Nigeria

This section will be discussed in three main parts comprising, first, the era of missionary

churches in Nigeria. The second examines the era of AICs, a reflection on the precursors to the era of AICs and the early Pentecostal period, and a look at the character of AICs. Following this is the third part that considers the pre-Pentecostal and early Pentecostal period of 1910 to 1960 in Nigeria.

3.1 Era of Missionary Churches

The history and development of Pentecostalism in Nigeria is not complete without a discussion of the pre-Pentecostal history of Christianity in Nigeria. Christianity came into Nigeria through the Portuguese Roman Catholic missionaries (Ryder, 1960). The Portuguese Roman Catholic missionaries arrived in Nigeria between the late 15th century and early 16th Century, particularly in the year 1515 with their journey to the midwestern part of Nigeria, precisely the Benin Kingdom, following the preceding business approach made by the Oba (King) of Benin (Ajayi, 1965). Unfortunately, this first contact with Christianity became impracticable as the missionaries could not win converts because of the chaos of inter-tribal wars at the time, thereby forcing the missionaries to return to their homeland. This was later followed by another failed attempt in 1651 by a group of Roman Catholic missionaries from Italy and Spain who arrived in Benin but were coldly received and turned away. However, additional factors like insufficient missionaries, differences between their culture, and the problem of communication due to language barriers made things more difficult (Ajayi, 1965). These challenges were made worse by the problem of having to reconcile their Christian faith with the activities of their fellow countrymen who were engaged in the trading of slaves under the Transatlantic Slave Trade (Eltis, 1987; Wiarda, 1995; Rawley & Behrendt, 2005). The influence of the Roman Catholic missionaries continued to wane and by the 18th century had disappeared (Metz, 1991). However, by the end of the 18th Century, things began to change under the influence of John Venn. The Church of England being the mother church of the global Anglican Communion currently encompasses the Anglican Church of Nigeria dating back to 1799 when the Society for Missions to Africa and the East was founded with the guidance of John Venn (Tomkins, 2012). This led to the Protestant missionaries who became more prominent in the scene and gradually began to make an impact in their reaching out and re-establishing Christianity in what is considered the second phase of the missionary endeavors in Nigeria between 1841 and 1891 (Ajayi, 1965).

The rise of Christianity in its independent and peculiar form in Nigeria in the late 19th century is owed to John Venn's son, Henry Venn (1841–1872), a Reverend of the Church Missionary Society. Henry Venn believed that Africans could provide the leadership role needed in mission churches in Africa and as a result, he tried to establish policies to that end (Venn, 1862). Venn's theory of mission was based on his native pastorate policy and belief that a church is indigenous and independent if it can govern, finance, and propagate itself as evidenced in a series of policy statements and pamphlets that he wrote between 1846 and 1865. Venn desired that mission stations raise Indigenous or native churches as quickly as possible because missionaries must endeavor to ensure that Indigenous leadership should be raised to succeed them in their communities. For instance, because of his policy, Venn was credited with contributing to the eventual consecration in 1864 of the Right Reverend Samuel Ajayi Crowther as the first African Bishop in the Anglican Church (Page, 1892; Fatusi, 2017),

discussed in the next paragraph.

The Society of Missions which later became known as the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in 1812 also had its founders involved in setting the pace for the establishment of the Society for the Education of Africans like Samuel Ajayi Crowther (Church Missionary Society, 1998; Mouser, 2004). Crowther's story is quite interesting. He was born in 1809, then in 1821, when he was about twelve years old, he and his family were captured and sold into slavery by slave traders who later resold him to Portuguese slave dealers who put him on board a ship to be transported to Portugal. A British naval ship intercepted the ship conveying him and others and re-directed them to Sierra Leone where he was educated in a mission school and baptized. From this, he became a Nigerian clergyman and linguist who made important contributions like writing and publishing the Yoruba language vocabulary and later translating the Bible into the Yoruba language along with the Book of Common Prayers into Yoruba as well as other language projects (Lake, 1879; Page, 1892; Walls, 1992). Crowder was known to have accompanied several expeditions to the Niger. In one of the CMS expeditions in 1841 called the Niger Expedition, Samuel Crowther was chosen as one of the expeditioners who later in 1844 was appointed the lead missionary to Yorubaland in Nigeria (Church Missionary Society, 1998). In 1842 and 1851 he attended the Church Missionary College in London where he studied languages and later received a doctoral degree from Oxford University. In 1864, Ajayi Crowther was ordained as the first African bishop (Lake, 1879; Page, 1892; Walls, 1992).

When he returned to Nigeria, Crowder devoted the rest of his life to evangelistic and administrative duties in his newly created diocese of the Niger territory where he worked as a missionary among his people. Although significant missionary activities were vigorously renewed in the 1840s, for a while it was confined within the Lagos and Ibadan axis. The first missions there were opened by the Church of England's Church Missionary Society (Metz, 1991). Mission churches like the Church Missionary Society, Southern Baptist Convention of the United States, United Presbyterian Church of Scotland, Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, and Catholic Society of African Missions were established in different parts of Nigeria from the early 19th century (Ajayi, 1965). This brief history of Christianity in Nigeria would be inadequate without a significant mention of Bishop Crowther who indelibly carved his name in history through his evangelistic quests in taking the gospel to many parts of Nigeria, including the South-South, South-East, and North-Central. Although he was never truly appreciated by the Church of England for the great work he did, several years after his death, the Church of England tendered an unreserved apology to his family and the Anglican Church in Nigeria which has gone to a great length to immortalize him. This includes a center built in Osogun town and the Ajayi Crowther University established by the Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion in his honor.

3.2 Era of African Initiated Churches, Pre-Pentecostal Period, and Early Pentecostal Period of 1900–1960

Before the emergence of modern Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, there was the era of African Initiated Churches (AICs) in the country. This movement will now be examined for a better

understanding of the focus of this study in tracing the evolution leading to the rise and impact of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria.

The history and development of Nigerian Pentecostalism are directly connected to the emergence of the African Initiated Church (AIC) movements, some of which developed in the late 19th Century, others between the years 1910 to 1920, and in the years 1935 to 1960 will prove to be more than simply a part of the historical landscape. Studies of these movements have shown that they comprised many existing members of the missionary churches moving from them to these new movements. So, an understanding of these movements is crucial to this study. Tied together, this is like a string in the development of African Christianity particularly in West Africa, which remains a breeding ground and fruitful soil for the expansion and growth of churches (Ayegboyin & Ishola, 1997).

There are three time periods between 1900 and 1960 worthy of consideration in the next three paragraphs. The first period, from the late 19th Century to the early 20th Century, saw the forerunners of African Pentecostalism the movement started with Ethiopianism (a Southern African experience or phenomenon) which was opposed to and seceded from the domination of Western missionary churches due to their views on racial, cultural, and political issues (Sundkler & Steed, 2000). One example is the United Native Baptist Church in Nigeria, which split from the foreign missionary organization, Southern American Baptist Mission in Lagos in 1891 (King, 1986). “Ethiopianism is an Afro-Atlantic literary-religious tradition that emerged out of the shared political and religious experiences of Africans from British colonies during the late 18th and early 19th centuries...challenging the then prevailing idea that the continent had no history before the arrival of colonizers in the mid-19th century” (Adejumo, 2007, para. 1). Adejumo added that “Proponents of Ethiopianism...claim that some of the first examples of organized religious festivals, solemn assemblies and other forms of worship evolved in Ethiopia. By the 19th century...many people of African ancestry embraced it [Ethiopianism] as evidence of the black capacity for self-rule” (Para. 1).

The rise of the African Independent Church as a movement began to gradually take deeper root from the 1910s and 1920s. In this second period, certain people and groups came out of the mainline churches like the Anglican Church. These include the Christ Army Church, an Indigenous church established by Garrick Sokari Braide, a former Anglican Church deacon (Pew Research Centre, 2006), and the Precious Stone Society which left the Anglican church in 1920 (Gaiya, 2002) and started affiliating with Pentecostal churches in America and Europe. Others are the Aladura Churches between 1918 and 1920 (Peel, 1968; Anderson, 2007) and the Cherubim and Seraphim (C &S) Society in 1925 (Hood, 1990). The Aladura Church movements emerged and grew along ethnic lines in the South-West region of Nigeria in Lagos and Ijebu-Ode in particular. Being the prayer mongers (Aladura) that they are, their emphasis was on purity, prayer, fasting, miracles, and renunciation of all forms of idolatry as their leadership displayed the kind of charisma and spirituality that is different from the cultic traditional religious practices (Ojo, 1998). Unlike Ethiopianism which did not have distinct practices that were Pentecostal, the activities of churches that developed in the second period displayed such distinct practices, even though they had similarities with Ethiopianism.

The third period from 1930 to 1960 saw the emergence of new groups birthed from prophetic callings of churches like the Celestial Church of Christ founded by Samuel Oschoffa who claimed that he saw a vision that led to its establishment (Crumbley, 2008). Prophetic callings are a characteristic of indigenous groups that gave birth to the modern Pentecostals as we know them today. Amongst them is the Faith Tabernacle established in 1931 which stirred a revival that saw thousands of people converted (Fatokun, 2006); the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) which began in 1941, and by the year 1990 was estimated to have had a membership of over one million (Anderson, 2001); the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC) founded in 1947; and the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) which started in 1952 and grew rapidly particularly under its present leader, Enoch Adejare Adebayo, with a large following of over 5 million members and still making an impact as of 2018 (Rosen, 2018). Also, within this third period between 1930 and 1939, the Aladura churches considered as the forbearers of contemporary Pentecostal churches started fraternizing with Pentecostal churches in Europe and America to gain legitimacy (Gaiya, 2002). For instance, the Foursquare Gospel Church came into the limelight in Nigeria in the 1930s (Ojo, 2004). Also, the Assemblies of God church members that visited in 1939 propelled the penetration of Pentecostalism in the religious landscape of Nigeria (Lugo et al., 2006).

Pauw (1995) indicates that out of the African population, at least 36% are members, and Spitzbek (2018) says 1 in 4 African Christians belong to AICs churches which provide ordinary people with a spiritual home and a sense of direction through these churches which are found across Africa (Spitzbek, 2018). The AICs came into the scene in response to the apparent inability of the early missionaries to properly contextualize the gospel which made the people crave and engage themselves in a more culturally relevant version of Christianity. This therefore brought the need to instill the African way into the Westernized missionary churches, resulting in some dissatisfied members breaking away to form AICs (Appiah-Kubi, 1981). Scholars like Barret (1970) were bold enough to assert that their desire to be independent shows a resistance against the Westernization of Christianity. While there is some truth in Barret's assertion, it can be said that it was not so much a rebellion but could be more accurately described as a desire to express themselves in a way that they felt was meaningful.

3.3 Precursors to the Era of African Initiated Churches and Early Pentecostal Period

Two individuals who were the precursors to the era of African Independent Churches (AIC) and the early Pentecostal period need to be examined as stand-out cases in tracing the origin and history of Pentecostalism in Nigeria. These are William Wade Harris (Haliburton, 1973) and Garrick Isokari Braide (Sundkler & Steed, 2000; Ayegboyin & Ishola, 1997). The works of Haliburton (1973) and Ayegboyin and Ishola (1997) provide a historical perspective, with lessons from their life and times, which incorporate social elements, and justify the contributions and legacy of Harris and Braide who tried to influence the African context with Christianity. Therefore, the activities and contributions of these two personalities will be discussed below to understand their roles in institutionalizing the Pentecostal movement.

William Wade Harris (1860–1929). Prophet Harris, born of the Grebo tribe of Liberia, and

initially a teacher and catechist of the American Methodist Episcopal Mission of Liberia, was a man of many talents with indicators pointing to the power of the Holy Spirit as a factor in his ministry (Haliburton, 1973). By preaching and teaching an orthodox Christian message that spoke against indigenous fetish practices, Harris encouraged the burning of fetish objects while calling on his listeners to reject occult practices. Harris, however, approved of polygamy in his teachings, traveling in the company of his wives (Jenkins, 2011). Though he was a man with limited education and views that were not in line with advancing missionary ideas, Prophet Harris influenced a lot of Africans who were responsive to his gospel message as he changed their situations of despair to that of hope and a new belief in the resolution of their problems. Being a valued and effective envoy with a new feeling of hope and progress that he was at that time, Harris and his actions were not appreciated by the French colonial authorities even though part of his preaching encouraged obedience to the French authorities and converted those who revolted against them.

Haliburton explains that the Protestant and Catholic churches benefited from him by taking on the converts that Prophet Harris won into Christianity. This was because they initially saw him as very useful to them even though they later rejected him as a charlatan. In arguing against the notion that Prophet Harris was a man with little education and intelligence, Haliburton asserts that Prophet Harris was a man of many talents, including being a teacher, a school director, and so on. Meanwhile, even though one may agree with Haliburton's argument that Prophet Harris' successes were because he understood the African way of life, on closer analysis it becomes evident that there were other factors such as what the Africans at that time perceived to be repressive colonialism. Additionally, there are factors about his ministry that would point to the power of the Holy Spirit being a factor. A study of Prophet Harris is relevant to this study in the sense that even though he did not even visit Nigeria in his itinerant ministry from Liberia, his life and experiences and the people of his socio-historical and cultural context resonate with the modern-day experiences of many Pentecostals in Nigeria.

Garrick Sokari Braide (1882–1918). Garrick Sokari Braide was an Ijaw man born in the late 19th century in the Niger Delta region of Obonoma, Nigeria. Braide's life and contributions are discussed in the enlightening work of Ayegboyin and Ishola (1997), noting that Braide, like Harris, studied church catechism and was famous for his religious zeal. Braide was a very prayerful man who later had a vision in which God called him into the ministry. As God's messenger he practiced lay preaching, healing, and evangelistic methods that touched lives and taught people to lay aside their black magic and follow the Christian God. Drawing material from Hollenweger (1972) *The Pentecostals: The Charismatic Movement in the Churches*, Ayegboyin and Ishola reveal that Braide was arrested, found guilty, and imprisoned for 6 months by the British colonial administration. These challenges that Braide experienced happened at about the same time as the challenges faced by Harris. It was reported that Braide said: "God has endowed me with prophetic powers, and nothing can sway me from that" (Isichei, 1976, p. 104). Additionally, Ayegboyin and Ishola (1997) identify that not only did the first prophetic Christian movement in Nigeria emerge with the ministry of Garrick Braide but point out that he also founded a movement that produced

many converts, thus providing a reflective perspective for this thesis.

One of the initiatives left by Braide as a legacy is that he contextualized the gospel to the people's benefit by encouraging them to sing and express themselves with a local or native flavor (Onah, 2013). Braide also engaged the people in prayer, fasting, and strict observance of worship on Sundays (Isichei, 1983) as with contemporary Pentecostal churches. Through an assumption of a native character and identity, Braide's movement which had thorough knowledge of local settings and locations, broke through barriers by spreading Christianity everywhere including traditional village centers, fishing ports, farm settlements, and remote parts of the region (Ajayi, 1965). Like most Pentecostal churches today, Braide's chief method was to hold evangelistic rallies. He taught against occultic practices such as the use of fetishes, charms, worship of idols, and visiting shrines - emphasizing to his people that unless they abandon their faith in the powers of such idols and occultism, they cannot get the peace Christianity offers them (Tasie, 1978). These emphases of Braide's ministry are a recurring attraction in Pentecostal churches today along with his teaching adherents to abandon traditional religious and immoral practices like worshipping idols, visiting shrines, using charms, etc. Braide redefined Christianity by introducing practical evangelism that met the spiritual and social needs of the people, thereby leading to large numbers of converts to Christ. Braide's emphases are approaches that Pentecostal churches in Nigeria now adopt as part of their characteristics.

Examining the contributions of these two personalities is essential for their relevance to this study, not only because of the striking similarities in their respective life and times but also their influences and contributions to the establishment of AICs which paved the way for African Pentecostalism. The life and experiences of Harris and Braide with the people of their socio-historical context resonate with the modern-day experiences of many Pentecostal church movements.

4. Character of African Initiated Churches in Nigeria

As was earlier stated by Mwaura (2005), the name African Initiated Churches (AIC) is also called African Independent Churches, African Indigenous churches, and African Instituted Churches by different writers, including Appiah-Kubi (1981); Anderson (2001); Meyer (2004); and Spitzek (2018), showing the many African responses to and initiatives in Christianity (Mwaura, 2005). The AICs are Christian churches that were independently established in Africa by Africans in response to the needs and culture of their locality rather than by mainly missionaries from other continents such as Europe, the United States of America, etc., (Mwaura, 2005; Oduro, 2008). For instance, Mwaura (2005, p. 161) affirms:

The term "African Independent" indicates that these churches have originated in Africa and have no foreign financial or ecclesiastical control. "African Initiated Churches" indicates that they were started as a result of African initiative in African countries, but they may be affiliated to wider bodies that include non-African members. African Indigenous indicates that they have retained an African ethos and that their ideology has a distinctive African flavour. "African Instituted Churches" hints that their establishment and growth have taken place on African soil, under the initiatives of Africans.

From my observation, I would add to the concepts in Mwaura's quote above by saying that these AICs differ from others because not all systems of culture are the same in Africa including Nigeria. This can be seen in the various flavours of worship displayed by some Nigerian AICs like the Church of the Lord (Aladura) movement, the Celestial Church of Christ, and the Cherubim and Seraphim movement (Ray, 1993; Olowe, 2007).

Some key features distinctly identify the AICs as defined by their emphasis on specific areas. The first is that they emphasize an African spiritual universe that stemmed from the historical, cultural, and religious heritage of Africa, and includes among others, folktales, beliefs and ritual practices, festivals and ceremonies, use of religious objects, and values and norms as well as having religious officials and leaders. These leaders believed that there is one God, the creator of a dynamic universe even though some of the other AIC leaders share similarities with traditional worshipers who believe that Christians and traditional worshippers worship the same God and that the difference lies in the approaches.

The second key feature is their emphasis on African spiritual religiosity which acknowledges that their beliefs and practices inform and touch on the mundane everyday facets of human life in a truly holistic manner. The third is with regards to their emphasizing the elements of culture and system of behavior that align with biblical tenets, and this is passed on from one person to another ensuring that information about such tenets is received and spread amongst their adherents.

Other general features of the AICs include their emphasis on their ability to freely participate in their form of worship, fellowship, etc., thereby stressing their African worldview. For example, they encouraged each tribe, clan, or ethnic group to use their traditional drums, gongs, etc., along with their peculiar clapping and dance steps to worship God. These worship styles introduced by the AICs were the very thing that the missionaries thought was a problem because the missionaries regarded these as being uncivilized and crude. It is therefore not surprising that as of the late 1930s, churches like the Presbyterian Church were still singing the anthems and hymns injected from the Western churches (Debrunner, 1967). Moreover, because reading and singing from hymn books were foreign to them, the local people who were uneducated naturally found themselves attracted to more simple and familiar forms of worship. These livelier forms of worship introduced by the AICs led to people being saved and converted into joining such churches. This was because the people readily identified themselves with the worship style of these AICs, believing that their hopes and aspirations would be fulfilled. The attempt to have an African version of Christianity instead of the one from the West appeared to have been encouraged by the AICs. This attempt, which included components of the African traditional religion, risked overshadowing biblical principles and values against issues like polygamy, witch-finding, etc. The AICs assisted in shifting the minds of the people away from practices of idolatry towards the Lord Jesus Christ with an African flavor to it. This action by the AICs helped to move Christianity a step forward as it set the stage for the arrival of classical and modern Pentecostal churches.

The doctrinal reliance on the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit in enabling the contemporary Pentecostal Christian to deal with and overcome evil forces was also a dominant

characteristic of the indigenous groups such as the Faith Tabernacle Congregation. The activities of this group stirred up a revival between 1910 and 1940 leading to a rapid spread until disagreements arose in the church. These disagreements led to the establishment of the Nigerian-led new Pentecostal denominations like the African Apostolic Church, Assemblies of God, and Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) between 1928 and 1941 (Mohr, 2013). For example, to illustrate its impact, the CAC by 1990 was estimated to have had a membership of over one million people (Anderson, 2001). Another one is the arrival of the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC) founded in 1947. There is also the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) which started in 1952 and grew rapidly particularly under its present leader, Enoch Adejare Adeboye, with a large following of over 5 million members in 2009 (Rosen, 2018) and still making an impact as of 2018.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study discussed the historical origin and antecedents of the Nigerian Pentecostal churches and how these have affected their growth and development. The study findings reveal that the emergence of Nigerian Pentecostal churches was not accidental but is due to their historical roots, origin, antecedents, events, and other values that were propelled by various groups and personalities that have developed over many decades.

The effects of the historical root, origin, and nature on Nigerian Pentecostal Churches disclose firstly, that the era of missionary churches is traceable to the 19th century in Nigeria, followed by the precursors to the era of African Initiated Churches, Pre-Pentecostal Period, and Early Pentecostal Period of 1900–1960. Nigerian Pentecostal churches continued to evolve from their early 20th-century roots. The origin of these churches is traceable to the Azusa Street Revival of 1906, which influenced early Nigerian Christian movements through exposure to charismatic teachings that continued from 1998 to 2018. This period saw a blending of African traditional religious elements with Pentecostal teachings, particularly in spiritual warfare, healing, and deliverance from demonic forces. Secondly, Pentecostalism significantly expanded and grew in the late 20th century, gaining momentum in the 1990s, a period marked by a surge in charismatic movements. This was propelled through its historical roots with personalities like Henry Venn, William Harris Wade, Garrick Sokari Braide, and Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowder playing influential roles. Their combined personalities, teachings, practices, and influence were consequential in various ways, significantly impacting Christianity and Nigerians. Thirdly, the nature and characteristics of Nigerian Pentecostal churches founded on doctrines, practices, and experiences such as Holy Spirit Baptism, worship, miracles, prayer, and intercession adapted to the African way of life.

This study on Pentecostalism in Nigeria has revealed the historical roots of the church and showcased the relationship between the Pentecostal churches and their activities, leading to their footprint on society, particularly between 1998 and 2018. This impact of Pentecostalism as an offshoot of Christianity continues to persist in contemporary Nigeria, West Africa, and globally. While Christianity, considered by its adherents to be superior to traditional religion has brought undoubted benefits to Nigeria such as Western education and economic development, the rise of Pentecostal churches has also influenced the traditional and cultural

way of life of the people through the message and tenets of Pentecostalism. Moreover, while the blessings brought about by Christianity to Nigeria are many, Pentecostalism has gone a step further in introducing its converts to another dimension of the Christian faith along with new skills, crafts, and industries such as modern health services, education, etc. The Holy Spirit was and still is the life of and inspiration for the church in all the periods discussed. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the Pentecostal movement has continued to repeat the Pentecostal experience of the early church by emphasizing the person and power of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues along with prayers, miracles, visions, prophecies, and ecstatic singing. On a general note, divine healing, holiness, and prosperity were and are still important aspects of the teachings of the Pentecostal churches in Nigeria which has been identified as the country with the fastest growth of Christian churches in Africa. Therefore, the reputation of Nigeria in holding a leading position in the Pentecostal movement cannot be overemphasized. Also, it has been shown in this study that the emergence of Pentecostalism was not accidental but has come about by a set of historical events led by different groups and personalities that have developed over many decades.

This article recommends that further research is needed to deepen understanding of the historical roots and foundations of Pentecostalism in Nigeria, not just in scholarly circles, but also by the relevant organizations and the churches themselves, including their arms and agencies. The recommendations include (1) Targeting attention for in-depth emphasis on their spiritual, social, economic, and political contributions and impact with a nuanced exploration of the interplay between indigenous spiritual beliefs and Western Pentecostal influence. As Pentecostal churches have played significant roles in social development through charitable activities, education, and infrastructure, future initiatives should seek to strengthen these contributions, promoting sustainable community development. (2) How to better promote their theological education. To maintain doctrinal integrity and avoid the proliferation of unregulated ministries, it is crucial to promote formal theological education among church leaders, helping to safeguard the core values of the movement. Therefore, it is vital for Pentecostal ministers to continually receive sound theological training designed for and contextualized to the needs of Nigerians in particular, and Africans in general. (3) Find solutions to address the prolific fragmentations within Pentecostal movements in the country that have led to numerous splinter groups. This can lead to a unified approach for enhancing the Pentecostal movement's overall influence and stability in and outside Nigeria. These recommendations can help shape future studies on the role and impact of Nigerian Pentecostal churches on individual lives and society.

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