

Religio-Philosophical Analysis Of “The Church” As A Business Centre, The Nigerian Experience

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Abstract

In Nigeria, offering, altar calls, tithes and seed sowing are sources of income for the Church ministers. The radio and television advertisement of different miracles is a norm. We hear of crusades and see flyers and billboards of pastors used in advertising churches' programs. The aim of this work is to show how religion is commercialized alongside other business enterprise in Nigeria. Like every other business, the aim of the advert, flyers, offering, tithing, etc. is to maximize gain. But the question is, has the commercialization of religion made the Nigerian Christians morally and spiritually better? Has the advertisement of miracles and church programmes enriched the ministers? The authors used qualitative research method, that is non-numerical. The work found out that there is an increase in the proliferation of churches in Nigeria, and that some of these churches are the sole business of their overseers. The owners of these church-business centres entice the people to give offering, pay tithe, sow seed, etc. The monies from these sources go to the ministers while the Christians are sinking deeper into abject poverty. There is an uncontrolled air pollution of the neighbourhoods by the religious advertises. The work strongly recommends the regulation of the religious industries. The people should be to realize that giving must be voluntary and that tithe, offering, sowing of seed are all for the material benefits of the ministers.

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I. Introduction:

These days, people do not just build churches only to worship God. They sometimes built it as a source of income, like business centres and shops. The days of partnership in business seems to have given way to the era of opening churches owned by business associates and Church leaders. What we now have seems to be business minded religious leaders coming together to erect churches for the sake of enriching themselves, and even leading some Christians astray through wantonness and lies (Jer 23:32; Mt 24:11; 2 Tim 3:13). They invite those who think like them to join them. The Church becomes a business and the pure aim is making money. Doing the will of God (Mt 6:10) and being with God in eternity (1 Jn 2:17) appear to become secondary. Interest in “materialism has overtaken spirituality.” Some ministers now ask, “of what use is being filled with the spirit when you have no food on your table.” (Orji, 2022, p. 160).

As a religious lecturer in the Nigerian University, you see religious principles applied in many aspects of our lives. You see students praying during lectures, some lecturers turning the lecture hall into places of worship, prayers being said at the market, motor parks and shops, etc. It appears to be true that Africans cannot do without religion. “Religion seems to be the binding cord between Nigerians and the Supreme Being. Nigerians are very enthusiastic about conducting themselves in a religious manner so as not to offend the god of their religion. ... Religion permeates every aspect of life, making it difficult, if not impossible, to separate it. Nigerians apply their religiosity to all aspects of their lives, including their economic, social, cultural, and, more recently, educational lives.” (Uroko, 2024, p. 60). This work looks at the new ways Christian religion is practiced in Nigeria cum Africa; “as religion has turned into a tool for exploiting the poor and giving them false hope. In Nigeria, the oppressors use religion to make the oppressed feel better and more submissive.” (Uroko, 2024, p. 64). It is concerned with Christianity and not any other religion such as Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, African Traditional Religion and Culture, etc. The major problem is that this work deals with faith and moral, emotions “devoid” of pure reason. However, emotionalism is no religion but one can easily be deluded, duped, deceived, tricked and cheated in the name of God, because faith sometimes acts without verifiable reasoning. How to help congregants remove the veil of ignorance is another problem, especially when religion is seen as “the sentiment (or emotion) of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions” (Nnaemedo, 2022, p. 1278). This work cannot do a psychological evaluation of the people duped because it is not its area of study. It only warns us to beware of religious billionaires who swallow up the property of widows while making long prayers (Mt 23:14). Jesus is wearied that widows were made bankrupt through their sponsorship of the temple treasury (Uroko, 2024, p. 64).

The difficulty in the work is the protectiveness of the people's faith and belief, also called “religious protectionism” (Nnaemedo, 2022, p. 1277). Few people will stand the least criticism of their Church leaders. Those who criticize ministers are seen as “devil's incarnate” or “devil's allies” or “the bad ones” or “against the Church” or “the anti-Christ.” They are often verbally attacked and sometimes physically bullied by the pastors

and their followers because they see themselves as "the untouchables of God" (cf. Ps 105:15; 1 Chr 16:22); whose irreligious life should never be questioned. When strongly said, "religion is synonymous with militancy, and weapons and ammunition have become essential parts of religious apparel." (Uroko, 2024, p. 64). Therefore, debunking false miracles, prophecies and claims of men and women of God as their economic means of exploitation becomes risky and more problematic for fear of intimidation and arrest by the State Security Services that have become the instrument of the rich. In his book, *The Jero Plays*, Wole Soyinka (1964, p. 58) writes of the misuse of power in favour of religious charlatans. "You had enough will-power to resist the revolting advances of lecherous Chief Eviction Officer on the rampage, you are trusted sufficiently to be assigned an official duty which is most essential to our national economy and what happens – you permit yourself to be bamboozled by a fake prophet, a transparent charlatan ..." God's name is used to cover up their excesses and you cannot verify the truth from God.

This work aims at highlighting the new ways through which religion has become "the means of making money" for some Church leaders. It looks at their *modus operandi*. The Scripture knows that those who make money out of religion are doing heinous thing because elders are to tend the flock of God, which is handed over to them not because of sordid gain; "but godliness with a contentment is a gain" (1 Pt 5:2). The contentment points to the fact that you will gain eternal life in the world to come. The gain is not material and those who seek sordid gain in Christianity are irreligious leaders. For no genuine religious teacher makes gain out of the people God (Orji, 2022, p. 21).

The work seeks to know if the business churches enrich the faith of the people of God and to determine how holy, if at all it makes the people holy, the congregants have become through the business centres and irreligious practices. The requestion is: Does the commercialization of religious practices make Nigerians better Christians? Does the proliferation of churches lead to the reduction of crime in the society? And do the business churches leaders leave the people in poverty? The conclusion is hard. "Amid the increasing number of churches in Nigeria, which promise social and economic liberation, poverty amongst Nigerians has escalated." (Uroko, 2024, p. 64). The methodology of the research is qualitative research method, which is non-numerical. "It is based on analyses of texts, videos and audios as well as the experiences of those who have opened religious houses as their sole business, and those who have attended such business cum Church centres." (Orji, 2022, p. 25-26). This research method allows us the opportunity to analyze, synthesize and apply the irreligious business practices of religious leaders in Nigeria cum Africa.

Conceptual Framework

Business means a person's occupation, commerce and trade. It can also be one's profession. It includes whatever one does for a living, how they do that, where they are located, who manages the business, the profit and the losses at the end of the day. A business person is the one who runs the company or industry or firm or kiosk. It has come to include some churches, that are modeled to look like business centres. This business must be attractive, because "lack of colour gets one nowhere even in the prophet's business." (Soyinka, 1964, p. 19). There are cooperative business as well as individual and sole owners or member of the group of investors and workers within the company. Dividend is expected at the end of the day. Without profits, the business will fold up. Today, churches spring up, blossom and wither within years. Some, however, withstand the scourges of the weather and continue to thrive because they are making profit out of their services. The survival and closure of churches depend on the profit and losses they recorded. The Living Faith Church Worldwide laid off "unproductive" pastors because "the growth index" of the churches that they were Chief Pastors fell "below expectations." (Aboduwade, Letter of Release, June 25, 2021). "Growth index" includes financial and population growth, which boils down to profit and loss. This goes a long way to confirm the opinion that "Pastor Adeboye is creating business centres, not churches." (Orji, 2022, p. 31-32).

Church Model is the representation of a person, thing or of a structure in a smaller scale than the original. Christian religion came into Africa in the form of Mainline Churches, that is, Catholic, Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian. Today, there are many models of churches in every nook and cranny of the city. All the small scare churches took their root from any of the Mainline Churches. Most of them however, are indigenized or oriented towards Calvinist Ground Theology. They imitate the Mother Church but make themselves rooted in the culture and the peoples' way of life. It is sometimes called independent African churches, such as Church of God Mission, founder, Benson Idahosa, The Synagogue, Church of All Nations, founder, Temitope Balogun Joshua, etc. These churches are modeled to fit into the philosophy of the founders (Orji, 2022, p. 32).

Business model: Business model is "a plan for the successful operation of a business, identifying sources of revenue, the intended customer base, products, and details of financing." Some ministers now model religion to be businesslike. Such preachers consider location, viability of the city, the number of industries sited and its net wealth and produce replicas of business methods and operate them in the name of Jesus. Religion as a business model speaks of how churches evolved from soul winning for God to money making for the men and women of God; from spirituality to materialism, financial and economic profit organizations; all within the house of God.

They use catchy expressions to entrap the unsuspecting religious minded but naïve Nigerian Christians. Their expressions include, Amen and Amen, In Jesus Name, Alleluia somebody, I can do all things in Jesus' name, claim it, the Lord is good, etc. (Udoeye, 2015, p. 32-33). Some of their placebo techniques are, God has done it for you, in short, it is already well with you. The days of heavenly oriented homilies and Church piety have moved over to the economic gain, material profits and financial breakthrough. Pastors now speak of anointing that breaks the yoke of poverty, the anointing for wealth for the children of God. According to David O. Oyedepo (2018, p. 145), "so, for a poor man today to become a wealthy man tomorrow, some force has to be in operation – mental, financial, physical, etc. So also in the covenant, supernatural forces have to go into operation for wealth to be released or acquired." His claim is simple. You must invest money before the man of God can help you obtain a breakthrough. Regrettably, the viability of churches is no longer counted in terms of faith and moral, but quantified in economic viability. However, the question should have been, are souls living there? If yes, then, it is viable because pastors are posted to save souls and not just for pecuniary reasons. The Holy Father, Pope Francis called the business Church a scandal. "It is scandalous when the Temple, the House of God, becomes a place of business." (Harris, Nov 21, 2014). His conclusion is this, "When a priest becomes a businessman of any kind, an entrepreneur, he loses the closeness to the people. He loses the poverty which makes him like the poor crucified Christ." If you apply this to ministers of God, you will accept the fact that whoever competes with businessmen and women within the house of God has lost the essence and the purity of the ministry. But now that religion has become a business for many pastors and priests, have they lost completely the essence of the Christian faith?

The word *priest*, *pastor* or *minister* or *Church leader* will be used interchangeably. It could be priests and pastors or pastors and priests or ministers of God or men and women of God. The word *pastor* is derived from the Latin noun *pastor* which could mean a shepherd or one who leads a Christian community. Whenever it is used in this work, it denotes the generic usage. *Priest* is "an authorized mediator who offers a true sacrifice in acknowledgment of God's supreme dominion over human beings and in expiation for their sins." (Hardon, 1985, p. 343). However, when the noun *priest* is used in its generic form it includes any person who has been ordained, trained or even untrained to perform religious duties. Some of them are under the authority of bishops and overseers while some are independent pastors. It does not exclude traditional, unorthodox and *juju* priests. But the common denominator for priests or pastors in churches is that they operate "in Jesus Name." *Pastors*, *priests* and *ministers* embrace Mainline, Pentecostal and independent Church leaders and representatives.

Money is the means of trade by barter; "a current medium of exchange in the form of coins and banknotes." It is also "what you earn by working or selling things, and use to buy things. We speak of "to borrow" or "to save" or "to spend" or "to earn" money. (Turnbull, 2010, p. 955). Money is a means of exchange of services rendered by the inferior to the superior or vice versa. It has a spirit of dominance and power. Hence, it is said that money has become a god without a particular shrine but it is worshipped worldwide. "Mammon is a powerful god, though it has no known shrine. It has many faithful adherents." (Udoeye, 2015, p. 43). The problem, however is that the acquisition of money left its secular domain to a sacred environment. "It has cleverly entered into the sanctuary. Its nooks and hooks have entrapped many ministers of the gospel." (Udoeye, 2015, p. 43). The Scripture says that "the love of money is the root of all evil." (1 Tim 6:10). The love of money comes in categories and forms. It commands nations and stands as the ground for measuring power and relevance.

Religion has its root in Latin. It "is from the Latin word *religio*, which describes the religious act." From the verb *religio*, we derived three other verbs. *Relegere* could mean "constantly turn to or consciously observe" or *religari*, that is, "binding oneself back to one's origin and goal," and *reeligere*, "to choose again to live religiously by one's origin and goal." (Nnaemede, 2022, p. 1278). Religion means many things to many people. It has both positive and negative connotations. For those who belief in the supernatural being, it is the power of God for the salvation of the world. Religion leads individuals to their creator. It operates on the level of faith and belief. It specifies how people could relate to each other and their way to the supernatural. For those who see it negatively, however, religion has a domineering power in the world where it could be seen as a "bipolar phenomenon" (Nnaemede, 2022, p. 1278). It operates on the level of "the fear of the unknown prevalent in religion to do so." (Amoke, 2017, p. 13). When you combine the domineering power of the god of money with the god of religion; you will produce a "monster of dominance" in a state of power that controls most people. If the "monster" is not defending the god of money with religion, it is defending the god of religion with the money. Paul A. Amoke (2017, p. 13) maintains that religion was seen "as a super structure while economic interest becomes the base to achieve the aim." Religion has remained a super structure used even now to achieve economic interest of pastors and priests. "This is done through peaceful preaching to condition the revolutionary nature of beings so that it becomes a blanket cover to their faces which hinder them from seeing the negative effect of the exploitation." Religion should help worshippers to seek union with the divine, but today, religion appears to seek economic security for the men and women of God through the congregants.

The noun *philosophy* φιλοσοφία (*philosophia*) is a compound Greek word, φίλος (*philos*) meaning friend or lover and σοφία (*Sophia*), wisdom. Philosophy is the love of wisdom and knowledge. It is the pursuit of

wisdom, "a search for a general understanding of values and reality by chiefly speculative rather than observational means" or "an analysis of the grounds of and concepts expressing fundamental beliefs." It seeks to know "the most basic beliefs, concepts, and attitudes of an individual or group." (Merriam Webster Dictionary). It is the quest for deeper knowledge and understanding the why and the criticisms of the new religious trend in Nigeria cum Africa.

The *Church* is a place of worship. A holy place where God dwells (Ex 25:8; Rev 21:3). God dwells also among us (Jn 1:14). However, the Church can become "a place of thieves and den of robbers" (Mt 21:13). The independent hypothesis or variable is the Church, while the dependable hypothesis or variable are the pastors and ministers of the Church and business. It all depends on what one chose to do and how they chose to do them within the Church. For instance, the devil came to the Church with the children of God (Job 1:6), and that whoever does not practice righteousness is a child of devil (1 Jn 3:10). But there is a particular trend that is common to those who found churches. They turn them into family business. "In some churches, the husband is the general overseer, while the wife is the assistant general overseer. All too soon, the son(s) also get the 'calling' and start controlling Church affairs. The whole arrangement, as it is today, gives the impression that the Church has become a family affair." (Irekamba and Akinfenwa, 12 September 2014). It used to be *Ifesinachi* and Sons Limited, *Izuchukwu* Motors, United Brothers, *Izuogu* Holdings, etc. but now, we hear of the Church of God Incorporated or Revival Group or International Incorporation of Men and Women of God.

Religio-Philosophical Theories

There are many philosophical critiques of the importance of religion in the society. One of the prominent critiques of the Christian Triune God is Friedrich Nietzsche (1844), who declared that "*Gott ist tot*" (God is dead). (Depoortere, 2007, p. 171). Frederiek Depoortere strengthened Nietzsche's position when he opines that "God himself is dead." To buttress this point, he cites a stanza from Johann Rist's hymn "A mournful dirge", that is, "O Trauigkeit, O Herzeleid" ("Oh sadness, Oh heartache"). "O Grosses Not! Gott selbst liegt tot, Am Kreuz ist er gestorben, Hat dadurch das Himmelreich uns aus lieb erworben." (O what a great emergency. God himself lies dead. He died on the cross. Through his dead, he won for us the eternal life in heaven). (Depoortere, 2007, p. 171). Brian Leiter expands the expression, "God is dead." "Nietzsche famously proclaimed the 'death of God,' but in so doing it was not God's death that was really notable—Nietzsche assumes that most reflective, modern readers realize that 'the belief in the Christian god has become unbelievable' (GS 343)—but the implications of that belief becoming unbelievable, namely, 'how much must collapse now that this faith has been undermined...'" (Leiter, 2019, p. 386). Christianity in Nigeria cum Africa might not have declared God's death as Friedrich Nietzsche did, but the faith has been greatly undermined by numerous Church practices. There is a shift in the traditional belief and morality therein to the view of the intending collapse of Christian faith and moral. One of the abuses crept in through the commercialization of the Christian religion. "Pentecostalism that is booming in the Nigerian religious market" (Uroko, 2024, p. 59), is at the centre of it all. Pentecostalism came in with prosperity theology. The pastors make unrealistic claims. "We are God's money managers ... God has been converted into services and marketable products." This statement is meant to push Christians to bring more money. They "are coerced psychologically by this statement." Consider a student who gave their phone as a seed offering to the Church fellowship or a woman who gave out her new car for seed sowing because the pastor said that "givers never lack"; and blessed are those who give than the receivers (Acts 20:35) or students who offered their school fees and feeding money because "the pastor promises that anything given to God will be returned tenfold." (Uroko, 2024, p. 61). Another theory that fits into our analyses is the philosophy of Karl Heinrich Marx, whose theory sees religion as an illusion, and worshipers as those who live under "the prevalence of psychoactive substance use" (Orji, et al, 2025, p. 401). Thus, he declared that "religion is the opium of the masses." Favour Chukwuemeka Uroko expands this theory.

Karl Heinrich Marx (1818–1883) declared religion the 'opium of the people.' His philosophy questions the role of religion in society. It seems that Karl Marx's philosophy is observable in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria. Thus, students take their money for feeding, buying textbooks, paying school fees, and other sundry items and give them to the spiritual daddy. These campus pastors, having understood the power of religion in destabilizing the sense of reasoning of students, continue to manipulate religion, projecting giving as the essence of enjoying God's patronage. They establish three important values and associated practices to coerce their followers. These values are divine advice, advice from clergy, and other religiously oriented advice about money and work that have important merit." (Uroko, 2024, p. 61-62).

Based on the manipulative words of ministers, some use their money to cook for them, buy suits and furnish houses for them. In truth, spiritual daddies have converted churches and congregants into their own business centres. Thus, they feed on the over religious zeal and on the innocence of some Christians.

This work takes the scriptural position on the use of money, that is, *Ipsissima verba* (the very words) of Jesus as it is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus did not promise his followers a prosperous life in this world. He said in Mt 16:24, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and

follow me." The demand is "to deny yourself" or "to forget oneself" (ἀπαρνησάσθω, *aparnēsasthō*). This self-denial akin to *kenosis* (self-emptying of Jesus; Phil 2:5-7), which has nothing to do with acquisition of wealth, rather, taking the position of the slave. Thus, Jesus warned the disciples to be careful with money because "you cannot serve both God and mammon" (Mt 6:24). Serving God and the pursuit of economic riches are two independent variables. You cannot serve both God and Mammon. You can't love both equally nor serve them mutually. The tendency is that religious business "places more premium on the altar of mammon" (Nnaemedo, 2022, p. 1278). The two services are at variants with each other, because the love shown and service given to riches will certainly lead to the neglect or even abandonment of God and the "politization and commercialization" of the faith (Nnaemedo, 2022, p. 1277). The person who loves and serves mammon, that idol of the worldliness, cannot but unequally love and serve the Triune God. The love of money is the root of all evil (1 Tim 6:10). Serving both God and mammon is idolatry. They are contradictory and cannot go hand in hand. Jesus' warning to the disciples is clear. "Therefore, do not worry, saying, 'what will we eat?' or 'what will we wear?' for it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed, your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well," (Mt 6:31-33). There is no need to turn the Church into a business centre by being over anxious about earthly riches.

The Establishment of churches as Business Centre

A business Center is a place where people transact their commerce on daily basis. Many churches have become purely a daily business for the man and woman of God. They have no other business except to strategize on how to make money from the unsuspecting worshippers (Nnaemedo, 2022, p. 1278). They sit daily in the Church, from morning till evening waiting for "customers." They pray with those who visit the Church, prophesize breakthrough and open-door policies, prosperity and wellbeing of the worshippers. For sure, worshippers drop money. In The Jero Plays, Ananias complained to Jero that the absence of the congregants has turned him into a beggar. Hence, he asks for financial support from Jero. "Could you lend me a shilling or two for the meeting? You know I wouldn't ask if ... Things haven't been going well lately. No contribution, nothing at all. The congregation have shrunk to nothing and even them as comes, all I get is story of their family troubles. They no longer pay tithes." (Soyinka, 1964, p. 54). This opinion is shared by Ogunbade Adewale Olusegun (2020, p. 61) who opines that "The proliferation has no positive impact or brings negative effect on the nation which makes people doubt if churches have not been turned into business ventures, and to the extent that the Government wants to place taxes on churches like other business companies in the nation which will confirm churches to be business organizations." Thus, prayer answered appears now to depend on what the man or woman of God gained on daily bases.

The Management of "the Church" as a Business Centre

Business has its strategies. This is the same with the new trend in religious business. All the subtle techniques used to attract "customers" to the business centre are borrowed and Christianized. These techniques include

Offering

One of the first methods of helping priests was through the freewill donations and giving of offertory. In an agrarian society, the Lord commanded this. "Do not appear before the Lord emptyhanded, for all that you offer is in fulfillment of the commandment. The offering of the righteous enriches the altar, and its pleasing odor rises before the Most High." (Sirach 35:6-7). In this Old Testament era, those who come to Church have come to worship God, thank him for protection and ask him for their private needs. They bring offerings to the altar, but it is for the good of the Aaronic priest. In the New Testament dispensation, people are encouraged to give as they have decided in their hearts and as the spirit directs, without grudges and compulsion but cheerfully (2 Cor 9:7), because God gave them freely to us (1 Cor 2:12). Those who do not have money can use whatever they have for their offering. However, this has changed. At the recommendation of Pentecostals, offertory money was raised up so that people may increase what they are giving. Raise your money so that God will bless it. God wants to see what you are offering to him. This technique seems to have worked. They moved away completely from private offering to induced and manipulative giving and not just that, it should be fat envelope of thanksgiving. According to David Ibiyeomie (2017, p. 23-24), "before multiplication comes you must employ the supernatural step of thanksgiving. Everything appreciates when you appreciate God. Nothing good reduces with thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is a spiritual yeast that increases the substance for which you are thanking God." Everything increases if you thank God. But the thanksgiving money is for the good of the men and women of God. Some pastors now insist that the lower denominations and certain food stuff should not be part of the offering. People are encouraged to go for offertory procession in rolls. "Never come to a Church without giving an offering. If you do not give an offering, you end up suffering. Zero offering multiplied by one thousand prayers is zero ... Your

offering is your seed; without the seed, your prayer is wasted. It becomes a religious fatigue." (Ibiyeomie, 2017, 153). The pastor does not ask: Do the people have the money? Have the people of God eaten this week? What is important for most ministers is your offering money, which is for their own upkeep.

Advertisement of Religious Practices

One of the important tools in business world is advertisement. Young, elegant and intelligent people are act as models. Their job mainly is to promote the goods and market the products of the company. Companies and business groups hire them to publicize their goods and lure the unsuspecting public towards liking their products. "It is also known that many of these churches are owned by people whose ulterior motive is to exploit their unsuspecting members." (Uroko, 2024, p. 64). In a way, they have no other work except to invent new techniques and methods through which they sell the products, win more customers and maximal gain. This is the trend in the Nigerian Christianity.

Media houses schedule strategic times within their program to place advertisements. They entice the public with these adverts. People pay heavily to the tune of millions to advertise their goods. They pay professional bodies whose job it is to manage the advert of their company. Sometimes, they even pay young ladies who are willing to go nude in the name of advertising the goods. These have become the trend in religious world. "Advertisement is indeed a powerful instrument that enables the Preachers to trap the mind and entrap people's passion. It has the propelling power of seduction, conviction, enticement and attraction. It seems to work, when such programmes are advertized, and lots of money invested on catch them all special shots, many people do attend. The secret is that when more people come for the programme that means more money. This is the nowadays trend." (Oduye, 2015, p. 65). With this strategy, money is the target of the advertisement of most preachers.

Another form of advertisement is the sharing of flyers and the use of Billboards. The picture of the pastor covers the whole billboard. You are invited to come for your miracle. The house-to-house distribution of flyers and the sharing of flyers to passersby are also used. Sometimes the service team use buses and move around the city with blasting musical instruments mounted on the open van. They are creating awareness by advertising the day, the venue and time of the program of the miracle and power display of the man of minister who will soon storm the city. The handbills and tracks are all made attractive for the spreading of the crusade and the message of the anticipated man of God (Soyinka, 1964, p. 19).

There are many television and radio house preachers in Nigeria. Tune in on Sunday and you will see that almost all the channels are occupied by those preachers who are advertising their miracles, the good deeds of the Lord, how you are going to be rich and prosper. You are invited to come with your problems and be liberated in Jesus' name. Amen. These preachers fascinate "people by advertisement both of their miracles and themselves." However, "Money is the chief doctrine they preach rather than the kingdom of God. The implicit and explicit modes of their operation are the commercialization of the Bible and the name of Jesus with the sole aim of accumulating money by any possible means." (Oduye, 2015, p. vi-vii). A lot of time is spent on media and television to advertise and to raise money.

It appears as if the state media houses are for beginners. The media is "susceptible to manipulation positive and otherwise." (Nnaemede, 2022, p. 1277). Most Mega Churches have private television stations. Members of these Mega churches watch the ministration of their pastors twenty-four hours and seven days a week. It means that each time you tuned in, the man of God or his representative is preaching, praying or holding one recorded section or the other. It brought millions of monies to the ministers. The majority of what was shown are their miracles and teachings. "Today some people practice religion for money. They emphasise and display miracles, not for the love of alleviating the plight of the masses; instead, to attract more people for self-enrichment." This is actually selling miracles through miracles through the media. "In this context, the stress is on wealth, getting rich overnight without suffering of any kind." (Nnaemede, 2022, p. 1283).

Another way of advertising religious practices is through crusades. During festivals, crusades are organized at every nook and cranny of towns and villages. The crusades are aimed at enlarging the followers of the men and women of God. But when they are organized by evangelists, know that they are seeking for money because they have no Church, where they are ministers. The crusades are also aimed at enriching the organizers. To this effect, powerful preachers and miracle workers who sometimes fake the miracles are advertised. "The commercialization of religion is another issue that has today plunged religion in Nigeria into a deplorable situation." (Nnaemede, 2022, p. 1283). They are "ready to do queer things to keep moving and maintaining the former tempo ... Regrettably, stage-managed miracles and forged testimonies would become the order of the day." (Udoeye, 2015, 20). The Jews said to Jesus, what sign will you show us? What miracle are you going to display for us to believe in you? Our fathers ate Manna in the wilderness. Now show us your own signs and wonders (Jn 6:30-33). The quests for miracle and display of celestial powers have not stopped. The people really want to see miracles wrought at all times and at all cost. They usually ask: "Where is it happening? What we want is miracle Church? We want a powerful man of God. We want a charismatic priest. Who say that these demands

are not coterminous with the world possessed with many problems and with many people undergoing series of crises in their lives?" (Udoeye, 2015, vii). Often, the aim of the miracle is "to hoodwink, manipulate, maneuver or mesmerize people in the name of God while actually operating or working for satanic or for egoistic or brainwashing to lure adherents to imbibe their teachings and practices." (Udoeye, 2015, p. 4).

Another form of enrichment is the call for special prayer. During crusades and Church services, altar calls are made. Those who wish to give their lives totally to Jesus are asked to come forward. They are prayed for and asked to go back. Those who have given their lives to Jesus but want breakthrough in their business endeavours are called out for special prayer and blessing. There is a reason for this special call. The importers and exporters are their targets. They can import fake drugs and substandard materials into the country. These are not the issue for now. The issue is what they bring to the minister at the end of the trip. "It is terrible that often means of getting money are not considered. What is important is money, money and money!! Special prayers and often altar call for importers and exporters or for those doing Overseas businesses are gaining ground at Prayer Grounds. It is very important because a successful trip assures the pastor of a bountiful harvest." (Udoeye (2015, p. 89). The pastor tells the stories of how they prayed for Mr. X Y Z and today they are billionaires. All those who wished to be millionaires should challenge God by coming out here with their business money or Automated Teller Machine (ATM) cards. Almost all those who are at the crusade ground would rush out to be prayed for. The money they bring is a collection for the organizers.

Unfortunately, desperate people do not have time to ask, where is the source of this power that is displayed? But the Scripture says, "Test all spirits" (1 Jn 4:1) because "Satan can work miracles. He and his agents go to Church. They could start and pastor a Church." (Udoeye, 2015, p. vi). The devil came to worship with the children of Job (Job 1:6-7). In the time of Jesus, the devil was also found among the people of God; and out of fear he cried out (Lk 4:33-37). The presence of Jesus depicts the fact that "Jesus would spoil and uncover his hidden agenda." There could be devil and his agents at crusade grounds. Jesus boldly said: "One of you is a devil." (Jn 6:70). "Surprisingly, demonic agents run some Prayer Houses, Prayer Ministries, and even Churches. Outwardly, they seem to be professing Christianity, but inside they are practicing occultism." (Udoeye, 2015, p. 12). Therefore, the power of Satan can also be used in performing miracles. "The coming of the lawless one is apparent in the working of Satan, who uses all power, signs, lying wonders, and every kind of wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason, God sends them a powerful delusion, leading them to believe what is false ..." (2 Thess 2:9-10). Those who seek miracles at all cost should know that "the miracles, signs and wonders being performed in his name are like 'Greek gifts.' He heals and performs miracles to enslave and put people into more bondage. The ardent or myopic miracle seekers expose themselves to demonic miracle-power-point-delusion and manipulation." (Udoeye, 2015, p. 17).

Sowing of Seed

The next religious-economic model is seed sowing. Seeds are the things farmers sow in their farms with the hope of bountiful harvest. The yielding of the seed depends on many factors. If you have early rain and moderate sun shine, the harvest will be good. If you added manure, the soil nutrient will be better and the crop will yield good harvest. If the soil is left fallow for many years, it will regenerate itself and the yield will be a good harvest. However, if the rain does not come early enough, the sun will scourge the crops to dead. If the farmer did not manure the farm, the yield will be poor. If the farm is left bushy, the weeds compete with the crops and they yield little. Because the farm is bushy, rodents will damage the fruits before the harvest time. This primitive farm method has crept into Christianity. It has become compulsory that you must sow seed. According to David Ibiyeomie (2017, p. 153-154), "a seed is any financial income that comes into your hand. Every time money enters your hand, the first thing that should come to your mind is that the money is a seed." And you have to give out the seed money to get more money. His syllogism is superb. "You sow yam, you reap yam; you sow cassava, you get cassava; you give money, you get money." Christians are encouraged to sow seed with a huge amount of money. "Therefore, you should always pick the fattest and sweetest of the harvest for planting." (Ibiyeomie, 2017, p. 114). This could be a fix amount of money depending on what they want God to do for them. They are encouraged to do it generously because "God said that seed time and harvest shall not cease; so, if there is no seed, there will be no harvest. How will you describe a farmer who is busy praying for a harvest when he has not planted seed?" Those who are sowing seed with ten, twenty or thirty thousand Naira should know that some people are sowing the same seed with one or two million Naira. "You sow money, you get money." Some Christian communities print envelopes and share same to their members. These envelopes are titled sowing of seed. The congregation is encouraged to challenge God by asking God to do for them what they wish. God, they hope will do that for them because they have sown the seed of prosperity. "Until you give what you have, you will not get what you lack ... Your name is not Mr. Welfare, Mrs. Needy or Miss Beggar. You should release the little you have and keep releasing the little you have until you come out of hardship financially." (Ibiyeomie, 2017, p. 17). But how will you come out of poverty by giving out the little you have? His answer is simple. "Giving is living; until you are ready to be a blessing you will not be blessed." (Ibiyeomie, 2017, p. 9). If you

want to get anything from God, you are to sow seed and the man and woman of God will continue to pray for you. Those who want their business to grow must sow seed and God in his infinite mercy will hear the prayers of the minister and grant success to the works of their hands. "Have you ever given a tearful seed when there was no announcement in your Church? ... If your answer is no, you are yet to fulfill the purpose for which the wealth is given to you. It is not the money you accumulate that makes you wealthy; rather it is the money you invest in God's kingdom that has a future." (Ibiyeomie, 2015, p. 8). This is because "money in Christ is money sustained while money out of Christ is money soon gone. Wealth not insured in Christ is wealth founded upon quick sand. Watch it!" (Ibiyeomie, 2017, p. 13). Edwin Anaegboka Oduye (2015, p. 88) criticizes the practice of seed sowing, because the "pastor does not give wealth. Church does not give wealth. Wealth is a gift from God. Do not be deceived that your prosperity depends only on the amount you put (invested) in sowing seeds because if you sow bountifully, you will reap bountifully (cf. 2 Cor 9:6)." Some pastors see seed sowing as an act of bribing their altar. The Scripture says, "your gifts grace the altar" (Sirach 35:6-7). But this should not be. "Seed sowing should be an act of faith. It is not bribing God in order to receive blessing from him. It should never be conceived as trade by barter. It should be a willful and cheerful offering. Most importantly, sowing of seed should be a personal and deliberated decision taken from the heart free from undue enticement. It is nice to note that God is more interested in your soul than your money." (Udoeye, 2015, p. 114).

Seed sowing is money given to the pastor for his wellbeing. Hence, if the pastor is an independent person from one of the religious sects, the seed money will be plunged back into the pastor's private business venture. The money helps them to build new churches or to move from the temporary to the permanent site. If the pastor is a senior pastor, their share of the seed money is a big one. "The gospel of sowing seeds has become in some churches means of impoverishing the congregation and enriching the purse of the pastors." (Udoeye, 2015, p. 88). Bear this in mind, the seed money you gave in the Church is your sponsorship of the pastor.

Payment of Tithes

When sowing of seed has failed to yield the much-expected results, new religious business method was developed. It is called tithing. "Before your offerings will be accepted, you must be a TITHER." (Ibiyeomie: 2017, 95). Tithe is the payment of ten percent of whatever you got from your daily business, financial benefits, salaries and wages to the man and woman of God. David Ibiyeomie (2017, p. 96) gives the two types of tithes, namely, personal tithe and corporate tithe. Corporate tithes are paid by companies and organizations. The monies from these tithes are said to be God's own portion. They are said to be sacred and not to pay them is a curse. He insists that "many people are dead financially because they have eaten the tithe." (Ibiyeomie: 2017, 88). Those who don't pay tithes are said to be robbing God, and God will punish them, but those who pay tithes will be blessed abundantly (Mal 3:7-12). "For example, it has been noticed that ladies who are committed tithers get married before others. Believers that are non-tithers should not be employed in any organization because if they do not fear God, they will not respect the management and their boss." Prosperity preachers maintain that those who do not pay tithes will not progress in life because "you come under a curse. You are marked for extinction; everywhere you were once accepted, you will be rejected." (Ibiyeomie, 2017, p. 101). If you want success, he maintains, you must be a regular tithe payer. "So, as you pay your tithe, God will empower you to succeed." (Ibiyeomie: 2017, p. 95). He opines that the "Kingdom Wealth is not possible until you embrace the foundational key of TITHING. Tithing is the foundation for financial prosperity. Prosperity is impossible without tithing. Tithing is a compulsory course in the school of Kingdom Wealth ... It is a fundamental covenant practice that opens up the windows of heaven; it is the foundation for Kingdom Wealth." (Ibiyeomie: 2017, 83). The reason is because "the foundation of the house is TITHE, the body structure of the house is OFFERING and the roof is SIGNS AND WONDERS..." (Ibiyeomie: 2017, 95). He maintains that your blessings will be blocked by witches and wizards if you do not pay your tithe. But when you pay your tithe, God opens the door of prosperity for you. "Tithe is supernatural insurance; it insures your life from plagues and attacks. The first thing tithe does is to preserve your life (Mal 3:11). Tithe is also your license (qualification) to material blessings." (Ibiyeomie: 2017, 85). "If you want continuous financial success, you must be faithful in your tithe." (Ibiyeomie: 2017, 151).

On the negative side, if you do not pay your tithe, "you are a robber (Zech 5:3-4). Your robbery makes everyone in your family robbers. You expose yourself to satanic attack. You will never stop experiencing unnecessary expenses. You suffer hardship. You hinder yourself from enjoying God's presence. Stops your blessings – your heavens are closed." (Ibiyeomie: 2017, 101). The payment of tithes opens all doors for you. They see those who paid tithe for the upkeep of their ministry as having done their part. God is to fulfill his part because they paid tithe. Hence, Kenneth Nomeh opines that "You made me to understand that if I pay my tithes, you will not allow devourers, cankerworms and palmer-worms to destroy my wealth. Father, as I am paying my tithes, fulfill Your word in my business. Rebuke every devourer and losses in my business. I promise You, father that I will use part of my proceeds to support your church's projects and programmes." (Nomeh:2017, 19). Here, God is presented as a magician. God, they think will respond immediately you pay your tithe. The conclusion is that "Tithing can break any financial curse over your life. Every attack is traceable to disobedience." (Ibiyeomie:

2017, 85). And that it also has a healing power. "A medical doctor in our commission was attacked by a strange stomach upset. All the Pastors prayed for him but he was still in severe pains that threatened his life. He suddenly remembered that he had not paid his tithe and as he wrote his cheque, the life-threatening pains disappeared." (Ibiyeomie: 2017, 114). You need to maintain the height God has placed you by regularly paying tithe. If you stop tithing, God will stop elevating you. Therefore, "what determines your prosperity is how faithful you are in your giving (of tithe); if God finds you unfaithful, the blessing stops." (Ibiyeomie: 2017, 114). You need to remain wealthy. As it is claimed that God will punish you and allow the devil to attack both you, your wealth and family. Out of fear, many people pay their tithe. If you don't want "financial death" you must pay your tithe.

II. Evaluation And Conclusion

It is fact that many pastors raise money in their churches. These monies are meant for the upkeep of the pastor. The importance of money as a driving force in the proliferation of churches in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. The offering, sowing of seed, paying of tithes, etc. are all means through which pastors enrich themselves to the detriment of the people of God. All that seems to count in our time is materialism. But how did the early Christians who had no churches serve God? Was it through material prosperity or in poverty and abstinence? It is the forgetfulness of the aforementioned questions that have turned churches into business centres, money-making industries and the congregation into factories for the men and women of God. This work condemns the commercialization of the Christian religion and the turning of the churches into "the den of robbers" (Jer 7:11; Mt 21:13). The work found out that, in the name of crusade, night vigil, etc. there is a continuous pollution of the air and the disturbances of the neighbourhoods at night. There should be demarcations between the living areas and the religious business centres. To enable the citizenry, have restful times, there should be regulations on the use of public address system in the dead of the night.

Many are the dangers inherent in advertising religious miracles. When the man or woman of God is successful, eulogies, gifts, monies and testimonies would be flowing in like water. However, there is the danger of "institutionalizing oneself as a demi-god and with all the portfolios that go with it. Pride lures one to allot success and miracles to oneself." (Udoeye, 2015, p. 19). They see themselves as special people and arrogate big titles such as anointed of God, powerful preachers, miracle workers, etc. to themselves. No man and woman of God want to go into extinct. It is a task to remain on top of the ladder. "Unfortunately, in every Television and Radio Station one sees series of self-advertisement of pastors, their Churches, their crusades, their revivals, and special programmes for healing and deliverances. One is appalled that many of the adverts that are always aired with special miracle shots aim at projecting the personality of the pastor and the mighty miracle manifestations in his or her church. The inner meaning of the whole awareness programme seems to suggest that the pastor has power to do miracles and that his church is where miracles do happen." (Udoeye, 2015, p. 64-65). It is worrisome that the power to make people rich appears to be in the hands of pastors and no longer in the hand of God. However, "power belongs to God" (Ps 62:11). The work recommends that more should be done to rescue the citizenry from the hands of the religious business men and women of God. The people are deluded by their commercialization of religion and made poorer as the ministers deceive them to give away their hard-earned money for tithe, offering and seed sowing.

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