



Pentecostalism and women leadership: paradigm for gender re-construction in Nigeria

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Abstract:

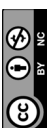
Gender construction in Nigeria is culturally constructed, gender processes are inculcated through the family, school, religion, peer group etc, as such women are relegated on their line of actions culturally. Thus, gender inequality has gained momentum. However, in the Pentecostal doctrines and dogma women position have change drastically giving credence to equal partnership with the men. Hence, this research aims at showing that Pentecostalism adapting itself as a Christian denomination that saturate itself as a possible gospel, involved in the rejuvenation of humanity have tendencies towards the appreciation and equivalent status women enjoys with the men counterpart, dominantly recognizing the important role women can play in the church and the society, as such priding the feminine role as a necessary complement to the masculine role. As such, women are allowed to own their parishes, women ministry, women pastorate, women counselors, women wing, and side by side leadership role with men etc. This serves as advocacy mechanism by Pentecostal ministry to reconstruct the cultural/traditional construct of gender in Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Pentecostalism or modern Pentecostalism (since 1901), as some prefer to describe it, is a renewal movement and the fastest growing branch of Protestantism. Mission global statistics show that since the beginning of the new millennium 27 percent of all Christians have been part of this renewal movement. This segment, some scholars claim, is now second in size to the Roman Catholic Church (Grady, 2019).

Pentecostalism connotes emphasis on the Holy Spirit. Belonging or relating to any Christian denomination that emphasizes the workings of the Holy Spirit, interprets the bible literally, and adopts an informal demonstrative approach to religious worship (Encarta Dictionary). It also has to do with relating the Christian festival of Pentecostal and members of Pentecostal denomination.

Gender construction in Nigeria has been and is still being wrongly misconstrued as a masculine and patriarchal led bureaucratic structured, where men are assumed to lead in all departments of human spheres. Gender is a social relationship which gives the understanding of what the categories man and woman means in different societies, gender differentiates between the masculine and feminine, and influences the distribution of power between men and women and how responsibilities and claims are allocated and valued (Ucheaga, 2007). It is worth noting that the most dominant and persistent aspect of patriarchal pattern is the belief in male superiority and female inferiority. As a result, women are rarely involved or given a chance to give their opinion on matters of decision-making in families and societies. Furthermore, sublimation to certain activities: the ability i.e. invested ability to bringing in a woman as wife, to procreate through her, to safe guard her



from the reach of other men and dictate what happens in her life is virtually taken as masculinity” (Okam, 2015, p. 50). There is, therefore, unequal distribution of gender roles in our societies. One may seek to know the reason for this. Most scholars are of the opinion that the social restriction on women has some religious undertone. A careful study of gender as a phenomenon shows that gender deals with the social relationship between the masculine and the feminine in a given society. The question that quickly comes to mind is, what is the link between religion and gender? It is worth noting that, just as feminism cannot be isolated from masculinity, gender cannot be divorced from religion. This is because religion cannot be separated from the society, which consists of men and women. Religion controls decisions in the society, thus, religion influences gender roles both negatively and positively. Every religion defines the roles of men and women. One may conclude that gender issues or awareness is orchestrated by religion.

Following from the above premise, the emergence and rise of the Pentecostal movement in Nigeria in particular, has given a dramatic visibility to some of the biblical teachings in the history of Nigerian Christianity. Pentecostalism has produced an impact upon the church in Nigeria and to some degree, the impact has been positive. One of those areas it has impacted the Nigerian society is its ability to give a good gender equality role that men and women enjoy. This paper aims at justifying the leadership role women operate within the movement as a paradigm towards gender re-construction in Nigeria.

2. Theoretical Framework

Religion is a source of social solidarity, social cohesion and provides succour or solace to its adherents. Scholars have overwhelmingly emphasized this view. This research adopts the views of Emile Durkheim that religion is a source of social solidarity, Max Weber religion and social transformation and Karl Marx’s writing on religion and conservation of the social status quo.

According to Emile Durkheim in Etim Okon (2010) the social life of the community is the functioning of the social structure. The continuity of the structure is maintained by a life process made up of the activities of the constituent unit’s function of religion. Therefore, religion connotes the contribution which a particular institution makes to an individual’s total social life. The social system, which implies the total social structure of a society, depends on the totality of its social usages for continued existence (Durkheim in Okon, 2010). More so, society generally requires some level of functional unity, if it must survive. Religion provides a situation in which all the component parts of the social system work together without opposition. Otherwise, organized and regulated antagonism is an essential feature of every social system. This theory is relevant in this research because Pentecostalism provides this functional social factors that help to organize and bring together both gender role “the masculine and feminine” to enhance social cohesion and solidarity thereby providing a functional society.

Similarly, Max Weber’s theory of religion as a source of social transformation is clearly a relevant material in this research. According to Weber, religion plays two major positive contributions to the social structure and social change. Religion has a charismatic quality and capacity for producing charismatic leaders or prophets. Religious charisma elevates the possessor above the realm of ordinariness to that of extra-ordinariness. Consequently, the charismatic believer enjoys relative freedom from any specific environment or structure where he finds himself at a particular time. Thus, he stands the chance of challenging, influencing and changing his environment (Weber, 1958). This means that Pentecostalism can function as a breakthrough from the ordinary routine of traditional gender construction which relegated the feminine role to the back. In this vein, it is an innovative and a transformative force which acts autonomously and independently on the secular society. This is clearly illustrated in the innovative and idealistic alteration of the traditional gender construction by the Pentecostal movement. The charismatic quality of Pentecostal leaders has helped in generating a new or partial social order in Nigeria through the Pentecostal recognition of gender equality. Pentecostalism as a religion engenders the spirit of love, unity and social solidarity.

Karl Marx’s theory of religion, “a conservative of the social status quo”, is also relevant in this research. According to Karl Marx, religion is the opium of the masses. By being the opium of the people, Marx implies that religion provides an illusory escape from the unfavourable realities of the world. It dulls the pains produced by oppression by bringing consolation and moralization that make actual frustrations either acceptable, forgettable or bearable (Marx, 1958). He further explains that religion shifts or transfers present earthly needs



and rewards to future heavenly hopes. In this perspective, Pentecostalism is seen as impeding and inhibiting change and progress in society by hindering and hampering revolutions and transformation of unwanted existing social structures.

3. Methodology

Since religion operates at both practical and experiential dimensions, it is important to apply an authentic and reliable method such as participant observation. Thus, in undertaking a study on Pentecostalism and gender reconstruction in Nigeria, the data for this study is collected through participant observation at the services of Pentecostal churches. This is supplemented with interviews with leaders and key members and information from bulletins, program booklets of the organization as well as the church website. In addition, theories of eminent scholars in sociology of religion and Pentecostal studies were also accessed. With the above method of gathering of information, it is important to note that the methodology employed in this research work is tripartite, involving participant observation, oral interview and content analysis of relevant literature related to the study of Pentecostalism and women leadership as a paradigm for gender reconstruction in Nigeria.

4. Literature Review

Some concept deserve explanation especially as they relate to the concerns of this research, these include: Pentecostalism, gender, and traditional gender construction in Nigeria.

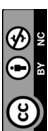
Pentecostalism:

Pentecostalism is a renewalist religious movement within Christianity that places special emphasis on direct personal experiences of God through the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Afa, 2010). This renewalist religious movement has its adherents called 'Pentecostals'. The root of what is today called Pentecostalism goes back to a small religious school called Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas USA. The director of the institution, Charles Fox Parham (1873-1929) believed that the Church of the era needed to be revived, and that such a revival could only be achieved by another outpouring of the Holy Spirit. On January 1, 1901, a student, by name Agnes Ozman, was the first of Parham's many students to experience baptism of the spirit, and speaking in tongues (Odey, 2015). The embryonic charismatic movement was at first significant only regionally in Kansas, Missouri, Texas, Alabama and Western Florida. Another important figure was William Joseph Seymour (1870-1922). In 1904 or 1905, Seymour had a special revelation to go to Jackson, Mississippi to receive further spiritual direction from a well-known coloured clergy man. Perhaps, there, he acquainted himself with the Watterson Holiness Theology (Ukpong 2008, in Odey, 2012). The national and international expansion of the movement occurred as a result of what is recorded as the Azusa Street Revival of 1906 (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1981). The result of this expansion also brought Pentecostalism closer to the doors of Africa. Thus, it is right to say that Pentecostalism is a product of western culture that has infiltrated Africa in general and eaten deep into the fabric of Nigeria.

Pentecostalism in Nigeria:

In the 1960s-1970s, a wave of Pentecostal expansion spawned new churches in Nigeria. The leader of this expansion is Benson Idahosa, one of Africa's most influential Pentecostal preachers. He established the Church of God Mission in 1972. In 1974, the Pentecostal umbrella organization titled 'Grace of God Ministry' was founded in eastern Nigeria. The Nigerian masses, later in the 80s, were already groaning under the burden of the structural adjustment programmes put in place by the Nigerian Government and favoured mostly the highly-placed class. It is, therefore, no wonder that they caught on quickly to the prosperity message of Bishop Idahosa as a message of hope for a better tomorrow (www.ngrguardiannews.com). Today, Nigeria has emerged as one of the countries in Africa with the fastest growth rate of Pentecostalism (Gwamna, 2011 in Odey, 2020).

The emergence of Pentecostalism in Nigeria is traceable to two sources, the indigenous and the European American influence. The indigenous Pentecostal experience is evident in the fact that, these groups existed before the advent of the European American Pentecostal influence. These groups had the real Holy Spirit



baptism and experience even when the American or European preachers or their literature had not reached the Nigerian shores. In this vein, Essien Offiong (2003) quoted Turner (1985) thus:

It is the spiritual or Aladura churches that Turner refers to as "Nigerian Pentecostalism". Although it is true that faith, healing, prophesy, dreams, visions, ecstasy, trances, speaking in tongues and various forms of spirit possession are common features of the Aladura churches (10).

Other traditional spiritual revivals include the Ijaw spiritual movement led by Braide whose Pentecostal practices included prophesies which were attested to in his charismatic ministry (Offiong, 2003). Offiong further stated that the Ibibio land in Akwa Ibom State experienced a Pentecostal revival movement six years before the arrival of the western Pentecostal type of revival. It accompanied healings, prophesies usually accompanied by African spiritual movements. Church movements such as "Obere Okaiame" are offshoots of this movement. This and other spirited movements are similar to European American Pentecostal spirituality. They share the same qualities such as healing, prophesy, speaking in tongues, casting out of evil etcetera with the western type of Pentecostal movement. In addition, the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star shares a broad spectrum of African traditional Pentecostalism which also manifested in 1918 with all the indices of Pentecostalism, influential enough to capture the attraction of the masses due to the charismatic qualities of its founder (Odey, 2016).

The emergence of European American Pentecostal movement in Nigeria according to Offiong (2003), was felt in the early and mid 1970s following the visit of T.L. Osborn and Ernest Angeley, American-based Pentecostal preachers, to Nigeria. The country has from then till date experienced an overwhelming influence of Pentecostal/revivalist activities. Some of the Pentecostal movement owes their origin to the western oriented type, whereas some are founded by Nigerians who break away from mainline/protestant churches. Offiong (2003), citing Hackett (1987), argues that the new breed churches and organizations seem to owe their origin to non-indigenous influences. They are new in the sense that although they are founded by Nigerians, they borrow their language, doctrine, technique, forms and concepts from American evangelical and pentecostal traditions.

Offiong, (2003) further maintains that the international or foreign Pentecostal groups got their way to Nigeria through the relationship with indigenous members and ministers in the country. There were other indigenous preachers who were originally of western Pentecostal churches and left to establish their own groups and added more impact to the Pentecostal influence in Nigeria: such groups are, Revival Valley, which gave birth to Christian Central Chapel (Bishop Emma Isong), Revelation Ministry (Fubara Emmanuel) etc. Another example is the fact that, some people hold it that Emma Isong started his Pentecostal ministry as a result of Ernest Angeley's visit to Calabar.

Some examples of Pentecostal churches and organizations in Nigeria include, the Apostolic Faith, Deeper Life Bible Church, the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Full Gospel Business Fellowship International, Catholic Charismatic Renewal of Nigeria and Presbyterian Young People Association (Offiong, 2003). There are other more recent Pentecostal organization, these include, Winners Chapel, Christ Embassy, House on the Rock, Synagogue Church of All Nations etc.

Gender:

Gender according to Encarta Dictionary, is the presentation of the sex of a person or an organism and of a whole category of people. Encyclopedia Britannica defines gender as a term for the representation of a masculine, feminine, neuter or common.

Traditional Gender Construction in Nigeria:

Gender deals with differentiation between the masculine and feminine. Masculinity and femininity, which are socially constructed, form an important basis for appreciating male and female relations in terms of sex roles, while religion forms the basis for the spiritual life of society. Religion has been one of the institutions where gender issues are learned. In other words, religion influences gender roles. They are therefore closely related. Religion emphasizes on what women and a man do and asks questions about the sexual division of labour and about the related division of social life into domestic and public domains. It says what comprises women's activities and those of men.

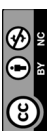
There are other factors that can orchestrate gender issues and awareness. These include education, economics and sexuality. It is germane to assert from the outset that, conceptually, sex and gender are separate. Sex is the attribute that characterizes one's biological condition of being either male or female. The attribute of male and female are universal and unchanging. For instance, a man impregnates but only a woman can bear a child. Plato (1974) in Ucheaga, (2007) alludes to this distinction in his the *Republic* when he says that the only difference between men and women is biological. This is aptly captured in his view that the female bears and the male begets. Gender connotes the differentiation between masculinity and femininity as constructed by the society and inculcated through socialization and education. According to Ivone Gebara (2002), gender is a socially learned concept manifested, institutionalized and transmitted from generation to generation. This requires of individuals to perform their roles as men and women in conformity with what their culture expects of them. It affects not only the males or females but also the relationships which they enter into. These conceptions about what are typically feminine or masculine characteristics, ability and expectations determine how men and women behave in various situations. Gender forms an important basis for appreciating male/female relations in terms of sex roles, in power sharing, decision making, division of labour, access to development, benefits and control over resources. Similarly, the assorted cultures, physical, institutional, social and economic constraints, which men and women are confronted with are products of the differential sex roles determined by gender.

Simone de Beauvoir (1953) assertion that one is not born a woman but becomes one aptly captures the picture. The ground for this is prepared through the socialization process which starts from birth. Gender ideas and expectations are learned from families, friends, schools, the work place, religious and cultural institutions, the media and opinion leaders. The typecasting of individuals' roles, assignment considered appropriate for both sexes and the level of pressure form part of this socialization process. Most societies share these roles and rights in such a way that they do subjugate the females to the males. Clearly. Social processes work to the disadvantage of the female. Plato advocated the abolition of the family for a different reason and made child rearing and upbringing the business of the state. The aim was to free women from the encumbrances associated with family life so that women's energies can be incorporated into the development of the state. Following Plato in Ucheaga's (2007) assertion, it is worthy to note that Pentecostal and women leadership roles serve as a catalyst for equal status of men and women.

5. Pentecostalism and Women Leadership: Paradigm for Gender Re-construction in Nigeria

The idea of gender reconstruction as used in this research is quite different from the modern day idea of sex reassignment (<https://en.wikipedia.org>). The sense here is the need to borrow the idea and methods of the Pentecostal Church in placing the women in the right position of leadership in the Nigerian Society. since religion according to According to Emile Durkheim is the social life of the community, is the functioning of the social structure, the continuity of the structure is maintained by a life process, made up of the activities of the constituent unit's function of religion, therefore, religion connotes the contribution, which a particular institution makes to the total social life. The social system, which implies the total social structure of a society, depends on the totality of its social usages for continued existence (Durkheim in Okon, 2010). As asserted by Durkheim above, Pentecostal religion plays the role of maintaining the status quo by aligning the female role with that of male to engender equality of both sexes.

Further, the notion of women being regarded as subordinate to their male counterparts in various aspects of lives in the Nigerian community even in the 21st century is a point of major concern. Often times and even sadly so, male children are considered as more valuable than the female child, thus, this can lead to social upheaval. this is why Durkheim maintains that society generally requires some level of functional unity, if it must survive, religion provides a situation in which all the component parts of the social system work together without opposition, which cannot be resolved. Otherwise, organized and regulated antagonism is an essential feature of every social system. As such, Pentecostalism provides this functional social factors that help to organize and bring together both gender role "the masculine and feminine" to enhances social cohesion and solidarity thereby providing a functional society. It does this, by way of organizing its organogram such that it



accommodates gender roles that foster equality of both sexes. This is the very point that Steve Afoma (1998) has opined when he asserted that:

The resulting system of customary beliefs and practices becomes the reality of daily deprivation, debasement, or dismayment which women in contemporary Nigerian Society are forced to experience. For an example, in most Nigerian Society, women are disinherited from their fathers' inheritance, and even in marriage, they are looked upon with suspicion by their husbands' relatives, especially and if unfortunately she loses her husband. The contributions, credibility, experience, challenges faced by these women even in their foster homes or their husbands' homes are all considered inconsequential. No wonder that Chukwuma, had lamented that women in Nigeria, despite all of their education, economic, urban and social emancipation, they are still tied to their cultural norms, beliefs and practices (10).

This has invariably hindered the development of women in Nigeria over-time. For a typical example, the Vanguard Newspaper of Friday 28th June, 2019, had carried news of a group of people threatening the Governor of Kaduna on a purported plan to handover the Governorship position to a female in 2023. 'This simply affirms that this problem is actually rooted in the traditional practices of the Nigerian Society.' Obbo (1980) had actually captured this scenario and had posted as a solution, "The breaking of the spell of traditional gender role proscriptions as beginning of women emancipation and the increasing of societal wealth, when men and women work together as partners.

There is a need for an urgent gender reconstruction because most of these rituals that have placed women in the present disposition are entrenched in myths, such as the Igbo folklore named the tragedy of Mgbeke, which simply connotes that women are the weaker sex and too fragile to embark on risky economic activities or the fact that TIV culture emphasizes that women are only shown a piece of land to farm either by a brother or husband, but never allowed to own it. Among the Yoruba, the same tradition holds sway, where in their creation myth, Olodumare bestowed on the male divinities, Obatala, Sango, Ogun and Esu responsible positions of leadership which enable them to influence and control the community, but Odu, the mother superior, was denied any important leadership position and she complained about this (Afoma, 1998).

From the foregoing, it is clear that gender inequality has and still continues to exist in various and varying degrees in the Nigerian society. For some time now, women have shown remarkable resilience in proving this archaic traditional practices wrong. For instance, in Nigeria, there have been prominent women such as Margaret Ekpo, Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, Dorathy Akunyili and Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti just to mention but a few. Of course, using the parameters of the Pentecostal Churches and the success of the women in the religious ministry, it is evident that the time has come for the emancipation of women from these traditional barriers to development and leadership. The Pentecostal practices are being used as a panacea to allow women occupy positions of leadership. Good-luck Jonathan's government raised the number of female appointment from 10 % to 35 % in parliament. This is 50 % higher than the international standard (Gabriel, 2010, cited by Njoku, 2016).

If women in some Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria today are G. Os (General Overseers), Presidents and Archbishops of Churches and are creating positive impact, it is therefore the position of this researchers, that the traditional barriers against women in leadership positions are outdated and have outlived its usefulness. The likes of Archbishop Margaret Idahosa, Apostle Hellen Ukpabio, Mummy Ebioeme of Port-Harcourt, etc. are examples of such success (Akpan, 2020).

In the light of the above, Karl Marx assertion, religion is the opium of the masses. By being the opium of the people, Marx implies that religion provides an illusory escape from the unfavourable realities of the world. It dulls the pains produced by oppression by bringing consolations and moralizations that make actual frustrations either acceptable, forgettable or bearable (Marx, 1958). He further explains that religion shifts or transfers present earthly needs and rewards to future heavenly hopes. In this perspective, Pentecostalism is seen as impeding and inhibiting change and progress in society by hindering and hampering revolutions and transformation of unwanted existing social structures (traditional gender construction) and replacing it with acceptable universal recognition of equal human right, equality of both men and women.

6. Recommendations

In recommendation for the sustenance of this development of the renewed effort to place women in leadership positions, the following suggestions are made:

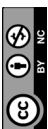
1. Women based associations should be strengthened and women should seek the support of government, non-governmental organizations to fund such groups for proper sensitization and adequate recognition.
2. Traditional laws favouring ownership rights only to the male child should be abolished and cultural enclaves emphasizing male superiority should be sublime with modern laws which recognize the rights of all gender types.
3. Universal Human rights laws which recognizes equal rights to all and sundry should be the focal point of all religious denominations.
4. Christian teachings concerning the place of women in the church should be reconsidered to accommodate women in all bureaucratic positions.
5. Education is a strong machinery for development, expansion and transformation, women should therefore be considered in a greater number for scholarship grants so they can gain education and use same as a tool for emancipation and empowerment.

7. Conclusion

Pentecostals operate a practical and functional kind of Christianity which is most appealing to Nigerians. The practicality of Pentecostal churches is felt in the area of women leadership and female ordination. Thus, the leadership role women enjoy in the organization is the yardstick used in this paper to conclude that Pentecostalism is a paradigm to gender inequality in Nigeria.

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