



JOURNAL OF LEADERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT

Volume 1, Number 1 (June, 2025)

ISSN: 1595-9457 (online); 3093-0618 (print)

Website: <https://jppssuniuyo.com/jld> Email: jppssuniuyo@gmail.com

Received: June 19, 2025 Accepted: July 13, 2025 Published: July 21, 2025

Citation: Johnson, John A. (2025). "Proliferation of Prayer Houses and Healing Homes in Onna Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State: A Socio- Religious Perspective." *Journal of Leadership and Development*, 1 (1): 171-183.

Article

Open Access

PROLIFERATION OF PRAYER HOUSES AND HEALING HOMES IN ONNA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF AKWA IBOM STATE: A SOCIO- RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE

John Akpan Johnson

Department of Religious and Cultural Studies, University of Uyo, Nigeria

Email: akpanjohn681@gmail.com

Abstract

There is great concern over the ways in which prayer houses and healing homes are being established in our contemporary society. Proliferation of prayer houses and healing homes entails multiplicity of prayer and healing homes with each founder claiming divine origin of his or her ministry. Thus, the astronomic proliferation of these houses and healing homes in our contemporary society in recent time is so worrisome and has created wrong images for the church in the society. In this paper, effort is made to examine the causes as well as the socio-religious implications of proliferation of prayer houses and healing homes in Onna Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. Methods of study adopted for this work are survey and phenomenological methods. Findings from this study revealed that the glamour and flaunting of wealth by many prayer houses and healing homes founders and purveyors have made them to become desperate in establishing prayer houses and healing homes in every nook and cranny in Onna LGA. The result of the findings equally revealed that these houses and homes are regarded as solution centers by many people. However, the study also raised concerns about the potential exploitation of the vulnerable individuals or ignorant members of the public, the blurring of the link/lines between spirituality and commerce, and the implications for public health and social welfare policies in Onna LGA of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Thus, it is concluded from the study that managers of prayer houses and healing homes should guard against commercialization of healings and prayers. Finally, it is strongly recommended that government should also introduce proper licensing of prayer houses and healing homes in Onna LGA to checkmate their excesses.

Keywords: Proliferation, Prayer, Healing, Onna, Exploitation.

Copyright © 2025 By JLD. Publishers: Omega Books

This is an open access article which permits unrestricted use provided the work is properly cited.

Introduction

A survey of religious space has shown that one of the phenomena in Christendom that has steered up concerns among adherents of the faith, onlookers, academics among others is the seeming unbridled proliferation of prayer houses and healing homes. Proliferation of prayer houses and healing homes is becoming a world-wide phenomenon in the 21st Century. It has been observed that some of the founders and purveyors of these houses and homes earn a living from there and it seems to be a thriving business as evident in the proliferation. Proliferation of prayer houses and healing homes refers to rapid multiplication of prayer houses and healing homes in the society. It is common knowledge to notice that prayer houses and healing homes are on the increase in our contemporary society. Proliferation of prayer houses and healing homes has therefore brought more chaos and disadvantages than the expected gains that religion is expected to offer. This is because one of the purposes of religion is to bring succor to mankind but in our own idea and worldview it is relatively subjective. Many people see this movement as a “commercial venture”. By this act, these houses and homes have been turned to business ventures with different names, missions and ideas without any positive impact on the society. However, Akwa Ibom State like any other region in Nigeria has been witnessing the agglomeration of autonomous and non-centralized Christian religious groups and movement many years ago. Although Church proliferation in a normal sense is not wrong because of Jesus’ command in Mathew 28:19-20, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father, and of the son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” but many founders of churches are doing so for material reasons, arrogant as well as quest for fame (KJV).

Furthermore, many founders are taking advantages of gullible miracle seekers, who will do anything just to have respite from their troubles. It is very clear that many founders of prayer houses and healing homes are selling religious tokens acclaimed to possess powers capable of bringing solutions to the problems of the users. Such items include oil, salt, handkerchiefs, water among others. Moreover, the astronomic proliferation of these houses and homes in recent time has created wrong images for the church in the society. The majority of people see the church as a “commercial venture”. There are also many clear cases where the founders are taking advantages of these prayer houses and their positions to exploit their innocent members. There are many other cases too in which ministers desecrate the sanctuary with jesting and other disdainful behaviours. Some founders of prayer houses and healing homes are noted for various nefarious acts ranging from embezzlement of church funds, extortion of money from members to abuse of positions or offices among others. Thus, Nnadi (2013) writes in this regard that this age has recorded the most explosive religious crusades, the most populous religious pilgrimages, the most resurgence of the phenomenon of proliferation of churches, concrete structure and flamboyant edifices that manifest the existence and physical vitality of various faiths. Yet, the society of this ‘religious’ magnitude launches herself into the self-destructive forces of moral laxity. With this, one can say without fear of contradiction that our contemporary generation is suffocating in the hands of various shades of religious aberrations fashioned by morally bankrupt deviants who enthrone moral depravity over virtues of the hallowed teachings of Jesus Christ. Based on the above observations, the present researcher became interested in the evaluation of the realities of proliferation of prayer houses and healing homes in Onna Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State on the simple logic that it will bring to light the causes, consequences and other dynamics of proliferation of prayer houses and healing homes in the area.

Concept of Proliferation

Proliferation of prayer house and healing homes describes the multiplicity of Christian religious groups. Church proliferation is a process that results in a new (local) Christian church being established. It should be distinguished from church development, where a new service, new worship center or fresh expression is created that is integrated into an already established congregation. For a local church to be planted, it must eventually have a separate life of its own and be able to function without its parent body, even if it continues to stay in relationship denominationally or through being part of a network. Christians especially the missionary and clergy men have always believed that the most effective way to reach the world for Christ is by starting new churches.

The global society today is undergoing significant constant proliferation and planting of churches which have brought not only changing values, but also greater source of solutions to people's problems. This rapid multiplication of churches is borne out of the understanding that, there is freedom of religious worship. Central to the constant planting and proliferation of churches is the issues of its environmental and religious effects on the people in the society. Every Christian Churches are noted to be springing up at an alarming and unprecedented rate in all available spaces, shops, warehouses, hotels, sitting rooms, uncompleted building, both private and public school premises to mention a few. The proliferation of churches in Nigeria today is as a result of numerical strength of churches which was a result of church growth. This rapid multiplication of churches according to Ibiyinka (2011) borne out of the understanding that there is freedom of religious worship in Nigeria. The society is witnessing proliferation of churches which has brought changes in values, created job employment, Western Education by establishing both Elementary and Tertiary Institution and Hospitals. Moreso, it is equally a great source of solution to people's problems.

Concept of Prayer

Prayer is a universal medium of communication between man and God or object of his veneration. According to Onunwa (2005: 54), prayer is an invocation or act that seeks to activate with an object of veneration through deliberate communication. In other words, the term "prayer" refers to an act of intercession or supplication directed towards God or object of man's veneration. Moreover, prayer can also have the purpose of adoration or thanksgiving, and is closely associated with more abstract forms of meditation that required rapt attention and mental concentration. Prayer can take a variety of forms. For instance, it can be part of a set of ritual or liturgy and it can be performed alone or in groups. (Onunwa, 2005: 67). As opined by Ukpong (2019:65), prayer is rooted in the idea of divine providence. It is an affirmation of a superior Intelligence which controls the affairs of the universe. It helps a believer to discover his or her position in God's design and provision. The act of prayer is attested in written sources as early as five thousand years ago. Today, most major religions in the world involve prayer in one way or another; some ritualize the act, requiring a strict sequence of actions or placing a restriction on who is permitted to pray, while others teach that prayer may be practiced spontaneously by anyone at any time. Scientific studies regarding the use of prayer have mostly concentrated on its effect on the healing of sick or injured people. Thus, the efficacy of prayer in faith healing has been evaluated in numerous studies, with contradictory results. Simply put, Prayer is conversing with God or petition and intimacy towards God. It is a communion between God and His creatures (Onunwa, 2005: 66).

Concept of Healing

Healing comes from the meaning and purpose which people attach to life and experience that helps them to cope with pain. When sickness strikes, and people's hope and meaning are crumbling beneath them, they search for something more substantial to anchor them. According to Adigo (2019), healing is a process of bringing together aspects of one's self, body mind and spirit, at deeper levels of inner knowing, leading towards integration and balance with each aspect having equal importance and value. Faith healing is an attempt to use religious or spiritual insights such as prayer to prevent illness, to cure disease, or to improve health. According to Egnew (2005), those who attempt healing by prayer mental practices, spiritual insights, always say that they can summon supernatural help or assistance on behalf of the sick (Adigo, 2019).

Healing may also refer to the process of reconciling broken human relationships, and to the development of a just social and political order among races or nations. Pastoral healing on the other hand is the process of being restored to bodily wholeness, emotional well-being, mental functioning, and spiritual aliveness. Medical healing is defined in terms of developing a sense of personal wholeness that involves physical, mental emotional, social and spiritual aspects of human experience (Egnew, 2005). Here, healing can be either orthodox or traditional, which includes use of herbs. Similarly, psychological conception of healing involves reordering an individual's sense of position in the universe and defines healing as a process in the service of evolution of the whole personality towards ever greater and more complex wholeness. Furthermore, the concept of healing among the Africans is derived from their perception of the aetiology of sickness. The Africans have an integral understanding of creation, with a harmonious membership or union between the gods, the ancestors and the living human beings. Life goes on well when this mutual relationship is intact, but when there is a crack in the relationship, there is a consequent disharmony and disintegration. The result is sickness or any other form of misfortune on the part of individual who is believed to be responsible through his or her omission and commission. This is believed to be the principal cause of sickness. Healing therefore follows the process, the restoration of the broken relationship through rite and rituals.

Concept of Prayer Houses and Healing Homes

As opined by Ekarika (2017) prayer houses and healing homes – *Ufok Akam* are offshoots of traditional African healing houses just like the neo-primal movements but they abhor anything diabolic or demonic. They comfortably fit into the mould of religious movement but not as churches properly so-called because often practitioners and adherents have recourse to divine assistance for the cures that are performed. They are similarly eclectic, syncretistic and exogenous and draw from a large range of sources including Christianity, Islam, Occultism, Oriental magic, Astrology and Metaphysics. Some homes are homeopathic and employ botanical medical clinics, physicians among others. According to Hackett (2004), such healing homes have places where patients often stay, the healer having recourse to traditional healing practices and mixing them with whatever religious direction they consider appropriate. During healing session, mysterious invocations are chanted and rituals are performed to ensure the repeal of the ailment which is considered to be a manifestation of evil. Often, the healing is carried out in such a way as can impress upon the patients and the public that the pastor-healer has specific gifts and charisma which come from some other enigmatic sources only acquired by the healer (Ekarika, 2017).

Ethnographic Sketch of Onna Local Government Area

Onna Local Government Area was created out of the larger Eket Local Government Area in 1989 by the Military Administration of Gen. Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, former Military President and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Atteh and Umoh, 2014: 35). Its name comes from acronym of the four predominant clans in the area: Oniong, Nnung Ndem, Awa Afaha and Awa. Onna is bounded by the east by Eket, west by Mkpato Enin and south to Eastern Obolo and Ibeno. The people of Onna are predominantly farmers. Onna is not a host to any oil company while search is ongoing for oil discovery. The state government is doing its best to claim neighbouring community ancestral lands and draw its boundary toward the Atlantic Ocean, so as to enhance and benefit from the PIB bill signed by the Federal government (Atteh and Umoh, 2014: 35). The local government is also home to a number of highly intellectual populations who have made numerous impacts in the community, nationwide and in the diasporas.

Onna Local Government is abundantly blessed with natural resources. First of these natural resources worth mentioning is fresh water. Mankind through ages has been struggling for good quality water for use by humans, animals, plant and industries. In Onna, water is always available in flowing streams serving majority of communities. The fairly generous rainfall most of the year results in flows of the streams given reliance on surface water for domestic uses and industrial purposes. Nature has also endowed Onna people with the presence of a number of minerals. It is part of the basement complex which is an important source of minerals and provides rich quality stones for building and engineering construction. It is blessed with various kinds of clay particularly good ceramics and pottery (Atteh and Umoh, 2014). Moreover, the people of Onna by way of worship are predominantly Christians. They believe in the existence of one Supreme Being. Outside this, there are Traditional worshippers with their unique shrines for their *Idiong*, *Ndem*, *Ibok* etc. Their belief is that, though they are different they are messengers of Supreme Being that see to the peace stability and well-being of the area.

The villages in Onna are: Ikwe, Ikot Akpatek, Ikot Ebidang, Ikot Ebekpo, Abat, Ndon Eyo, Mkpato. Okat, Ikot Edor, Ukpana, Mkpaeto, Ikot Esor, Ikot Eko Ibon, Okom, Ikot Ndudot, Ikot Ebiere, Ikot Udo, Ikot Nkan, Ikot Ndua Iman, Ikot Obong Ishiet, Ikot Akpan Ishiet, Atiamkpat, Awa Iman, Nnung Oku, Ntan Ide Ekpe, Awa Ndon, Awa Atai, Ikot Abasi Oniong, Ikot Mbong, Afaha Ikot Idem Udo, Afaha Ikot Akpan Mkpe, Afaha Atai, Afaha Ikot Nkan, Abak Ishiet, Ini- Ikwe and Ini- Edor (Atteh and Umoh, 2014: 12).

Before the emergence of Christianity in Onna, there was indigenous religion which was handed over by the fore-bears. The core premise indigenous religion was loyalty to the ancestors and accompanying rituals that is expressed by this loyalty. It has been said that Africa including Onna is a *terra religiosa- religious people*. Religion indeed has a profound impact on the attitudes, behaviour, plans, and destinies of the people. At all levels, collective and individual, the indigenous religions of the people inspire reactions and dictate options. Traditions and customs have been religiously expressed and persist for Centuries (Sidibe, 1991:87).

The Traditional Religion of the people during this period centered mostly on the pouring of libation, sacrifice, worship, consultation, communication and invocation of the God of Heaven (*Abasi Enyong*), God of the Earth (*Abasi Isong*) and the Supreme Being (*Abasi Ibom*) by the constitutional and religious king/head of a particular community who was known from the ancient times as Obong-Ikpaisong (the word 'Obong Ikpaisong' directly interpreted means King of the Principalities of the Earth' or 'King of the Earth and the principalities' or traditional rulers) (Atteh and Umoh, 2014:23). There was also the appeasement of the God of the Heaven (*Abasi*

Enyong) and the God of the Earth (*Abasi Isong*) through various invisible or spiritual entities (*mme Ndem*) of the various Ibibio Division such as *Atakpo Ndem Uruan Inyang*, *Afia Anwan*, *Ekpo/Ekpe Onyong*, *Etefia Ikono*, *Awa Itam*, etc. The Priests of these Deities (*me Ndem*) were the Temple Chief Priests/Priestesses of the various Ibibio Divisions (Atteh and Umoh, 2014:24). A particular Ibibio Division could consist of many interrelated autonomous communities or kingdoms ruled by an autonomous Priest-King called *Obong-Ikpaisong*, assisted by heads of the various large families (*Mbong Ekpuk*) which make up the Community. These have been the ancient political and religious system of Ibibio people from time immemorial (Talbot, 1967:56).

Tradition as interpreted in Onna language means *Ikpa isong*. Tradition (Ikpaisong) in Onna custom embodies the religious and political system. The word 'Obong' in Ibibio language means 'Ruler, King, Lord, Chief, Head' and is applied depending on the office concerned. In reference to the Obong-Ikpaisong, the word 'Obong' means 'King'. In reference to the Village Head, the word means 'Chief'. In reference to the Head of the Families (*Obong Ekpuk*), the word means 'Head'. In reference to God, the word means 'Lord'. In reference to the Head of the various societies e.g. 'Obong Obon', the word means 'Head or Leader' (Uya, 1994:45).

Roll Call of Prayer Houses and Healing Homes in Onna LGA

1. Utibeabasi Deliverance Ministry, Ikot Eko
2. Bread of Heaven Ministry, Ikot Nkan
3. Quick Recovery Ministry, Ikwe
4. Rock Word Deliverance Ministry, Afaha Ikot Akpan Mkpe
5. Raw Power Ministry, Mkpaeto
6. Royal House of Grace Church, Awa Iman
7. Word of Life Ministry, Ntan Ide Ekpe
8. City of Freedom Ministry, Ikot Abasi oniong
9. Kingdom Lovers Assembly, Ikot Ndudot
10. God of Wonders Evangelical Church, Ukpana
11. Pure Solution Ministry, Ikot Mbong
12. New Life Gospel, Ikot Eko Ibon
13. Providence Ministry, UkpanGarden City Church, Ikot Obong Ishiet
14. Clear Vision Ministry, Ikot Ndudot
15. Heavenly Anointed Ministry, Ikot Nkan
16. Direct Encounter Assembly, Ikot Abasi oniong
17. Hope Celebration Church, Awa Atai
18. Eternal Life Gate Ministry, Mkpaeto
19. The Tree of Life Church, Okat
20. His Word Assembly, Ikot Edor
21. The Zion of Grace Ministry, Ikwe
22. Bread of Believers Assembly, Ikot Edor
23. Holy Ghost Miracle Home, Ikwe
24. Higher Height Christian Centre, Mkpok
25. Obot Uboho Abasi Healing Home, Ikwe
26. Testimony Miracle Healing Home, Ikot Udo
27. God of Power Ministry, Ebanna
28. The Grace Assembly, Ikot Epang

Causes of Proliferation of Prayer Houses and Healing Homes in Onna LGA

- i. **Materialism:** The glamour and flaunting of wealth by many prayer houses and healing homes founders and purveyors have made them to become desperate as well as equate success in service to God to mean status and much acquisition of material things. They take advantages of gullible miracle seekers, who will do anything just to have respite from their troubles. The extent some of these houses and homes founders or purveyors go to, in order to satisfy their curious followers and rip them of their monies is dastardly. Essien (2010) puts it more succinctly that the mad craze for money has made some people willing to establish prayer houses and healing homes for their own benefits and interest. Though one might be tempted to say that there is no difference between the quest for money and that of materialism, but the truth of the matter is that, both walk hand in hand. In the early 30s down to late 70s, simplicity and modesty were the watchword of the pastors. The pastors or reverends as the case may be have relatively simple methods of worship and living Spartan lives. It is also expedient to point out here that, they (clerics) do not own properties like houses, fanciful cars and fat bank accounts. All that mattered to them was modesty if and whenever they wanted to acquire any of the basic needs and nothing more. The experience of the church now in Nigeria since say the middle of the 80s down to the present time is a clear indication that there is a sharp departure from the original land mark of reaching the unreached and placing of genuine emphasis on the hereafter. Most of these preachers' message promised health and wealth to those who believe. Most of their programmes are politically inclined, centered on this world rather than eternity. Bulk of their theologies is experiential and emotional, highly influenced by human philosophy and mental psychology, minimizing doctrines and ideas. Their theologies are as well shallow, fraudulent and manipulative in nature. Of a truth, the level of material quest by Nigerian Christians, especially clergy men is radically in deviance, and inimical to the values and life of the early Church. Consequently, the position of Raphael (2013) becomes relevant here in that; "a new kingdom in which treasures are found here on earth is preferred to a delayed gratification, and treasure in the heavenly kingdom of 'the other world'. This scenario places the Nigerian church in a dilemma and frightening challenge. In the beginning, the religious trends and point of emphasis have been that of values of poverty, simplicity, and detachment from this world of illusion. But now, capitalist ideals – which emphasize and esteem individuals and group betterment, which can be measured in material terms and can be paid for with money, now became the order of the day (Sule, 2010). In their campaign, it was believed that promotion of financial success is a means to attaining personal satisfaction. It was against this background that Raphael (2013) lamented that Idea that poverty could be a state of blessedness in itself, a favourite of preachers as recently as a century ago, is now hopelessly discredited. Even the post Conservative Pulpiteers nowadays exhorts their poor to get ahead, but to do it by non-violence means
- ii. **Unemployment:** The economic condition of Onna Local Government in particular and Nigeria in general which is depicted by the high level of unemployment rate in the society has led many people into what they would not have done given that all things are in good shape. Immediately people are unemployed, they float their own prayer houses and healing homes, claiming that God has called them. Although our society still needs to be evangelized, people should be aware of false prophets using the name of God to work miracles under black magic. Again, people lose hope due to the harsh social conditions and the lack of political stability needed to revamp the ever-failing economy. Their expectation that politics could solve their economic problem had been crushed. In desperation for

solutions, they turned to religion. And, with the charismatic churches flourishing, many people trooped to them, abandoning the mission churches or mainline ones.

Quest for money

Going by the position of King Solomon, 'money answers all things' (Ecclesiastes 10:19b). A careful look at the activities of prayer houses and healing homes today, it will not be misleading to say that "the love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Timothy 6:10). The early Apostle and believers did all they could to penetrate into the interiors for the purpose of evangelism, but in our society today, there appears to be a great deviation from the example set by early church in the way they go about their preaching and seeking the "lost". The question that is urgently begging for an answer in the minds of many concerning the proliferation of prayer houses and healing homes in our society today is, why are they operating in the major cities and also charging their members for all the services they rendered?

The plausible answer that readily comes to mind is the fact that, the population density in such locations makes it easier for one to amass wealth there than in the remote areas that is ridden with high level of poverty. What plays itself out is that, with catchy and animating words, founders and purveyors advertise for harvest of miracles, which turn out to be harvest of money. Using both evil and satanic powers to draw large crowds to their churches they convince their followers to sow 'quality seeds' (special levy), and wait for their miracles coming on the way. It was based on this unfortunate development that Raphael (2013) lamented that many have embraced the doctrine of money, wealth and prosperity instead of message of salvation. We should not be surprised if this could also be one of the reasons behind the proliferation of prayer houses and healing homes. Jesus during His days on earth had a similar experience with the Scribes and the Pharisees. He strongly rebuked them. for "Majoring in the minor and minoring in the major" (Matthew 23:23). All that they were pursuing was nothing more than how to get rich and leaving undone what Jesus referred to as "*the weightier matters*" (Matthew 23:23).

Quest for Fame

Competition which is a common feature of business in the secular society has silently masquerades its way into the church it is sad to say that, to some extent, no one is willing to be a "human follower" as taught by Christ (Matthew 18:1-4), but everyone is trying hard to be *seen and heard*. This is the reason why some who are supposed to still be under the tutelage of others are now founders, self-ordained bishops and General Overseers (G.O) everywhere especially in our cities. It is germane to posit strongly here that, behind the veil of prayer houses and healing homes proliferation in Nigeria lies silently the quest for fame. The quest for fame has led many preachers into preaching about their church, miracles and not about "Christ" himself and his salvific work. In connection to this ugly trend in the church in our society, Iheanacho (2013) observes that:

Today, many of our church leaders consciously or unconsciously measure success in life in terms of wealth, prestige and power: the three key principle of stratification, and social mobility in secular society.

What becomes the common trend in proclaiming and fanning the embers of self-fame on the streets today in Onna L.G.A and in many societies at large, is that, bill boards, fliers, banners and posters are reflecting the images of the founders and their wives. Seeing all these, the questions we need to raise are: Was this practice found among the early disciples? Was it part of the early doctrines preached by Jesus himself? Where does this trend come from and how did it find its

way into the Christendom? Without any doubt, we can see that, selfish interest cannot be farfetched from such development.

We must also acknowledge the fact that, the problem of the church went deeper owing to the fact that, the gospel according to radio, Television and as well as the Newspaper tended to become more of “celebrity-driven” and focused on what is “tangible and materialistic”. In relation to this, Udoette (2002) appends affirmatively that; “some of the new church founders are those who could not submit to the leadership and instruction of other church leaders, for which reason they broke out to establish and control ... for such people, the leadership is always seen as a threat to self-realization and fulfilment.

Socio-religious Implications of Proliferation of Prayer Houses and Healing Homes in Onna LGA

There are both positive and negative effects of the proliferation of prayer houses and healing homes in the society. The following are some of the effects in Onna L.G.A:

Positive Effects of Proliferation of Prayer Houses and Healing Homes

It is a popular opinion that the proliferation of prayer houses and healing homes is bad and nothing good comes out of it. But as much as there are negative effects, there are also positive effects of proliferation of prayer houses and healing homes in Onna LGA. It is important to mention here the positive effects before delving into the negative effects.

Solution to People’s Problems

One of the positive effects of prayer houses and healing homes is that they provide solution to people’s problems. These houses and homes have helped many people to solve their problems like illness, bareness, misfortune, trauma, witchcraft attack, lack of employment, delayed marriage, lack of progress in one’s profession among others. Many souls have been saved and many people have been healed of their different psychological problems in prayer houses and healing homes. There are so many people who believe so much in these houses and homes than even the hospital, and others prefer ‘uyere’ (spiritual cleansing) in prayer houses and healing homes to medical check-up. Thus, Onyishi (2009) puts it more succinctly that in our contemporary time; the positive result of healing practiced in some healing homes is undisputable. According to him many people have been cured of various diseases of both the body and soul in prayer houses. Again, interview with Blessing Ebong reveals that a woman who was initiated into a demonic cycle by her lesbian lover was delivered through lying of hand in prayer house. Similarly, Many people have benefited from the activities of prayer houses and healing homes.

Spiritual Awakening and Evangelism

The emergence of the prayer houses and healing homes brought spiritual awakening in the mainline churches. Pentecostal churches’ emphasis on spiritual gifts, biblical authority and evangelism make them stand out in the society. Most new generation churches are seen carrying megaphones and preaching in different places and converting people, thereby winning more souls for the body of Christ. They try to reach the masses at grassroots level. Their activities have led to the growth of the body of Christ and moral development of individuals. Their activities give way to spiritual transformation. The mode of worship, in these new generation churches gives the worshippers a sense of belonging and exhibition of emotion. According to Nmah (2008) proliferation of religion (churches) in society caused the mother churches to wake up from spiritual slumber. Similarly, Obiefuna et al. (2016:39) affirmed that proliferation of churches has made the authorities of the mainline churches sit up properly and

re-examine their method of operation and sometimes adjust the liturgy to suit the exigencies of the wider society. According to Ojo (2018), the rise of Pentecostal and charismatic movements brought a kind of spirituality into existence, constituting one of the main forms of religion in Nigeria.

Negative Effects of Proliferation of Prayer Houses and Healing Homes in Onna LGA

Deceit and Extortion: It is an indisputable fact that a common notion for the emergence of this houses and homes is commercial reason. Religion has been largely seen as a source of making money. Religion has also been twisted as it were to suit the intents and purposes of the users. Commercialization of religion according to Obiora, is described as “Holy Deceit”- the art of trading in God’s name. Thus, in the context of commercialization of prayer houses and healing homes, no service is free of charge including salvation. One must pay for it. For instance, during an interview with Mr. Saviour Akpan in Onna whose wife was barren for 12 years, he narrated how the prophet demanded for two goats and sum of one hundred thousand (N100,000) for the purchase of spiritual items to end the bareness. Similarly, interview with Madam Theresa Akpan showed how a founder of prayer house demanded for the sum of two hundred thousand (200, 00) Naira for spiritual cleansing (Uyere). Moreover, it is no longer news that many founders of prayer houses and healing homes are selling religious tokens acclaimed to possess powers capable of bringing solutions to the problems of the users. Such items include oil, salt, handkerchiefs, water among others. Miracles are also fabricated in some of these houses and homes in order to attract crowds and raise money.

Rivalry and Unhealthy Competition

One of the damaging curses of prayer houses and healing homes is unhealthy competition. There is a high level of competition and envy among founders and purveyors of prayer houses and healing homes in Onna L.G.A as a result of quest for fame, title consciousness and positions. The level of unhealthy competition by these houses and homes’ founders is radically embarrassing and inimical to the core values of Christianity. In order to avoid the error of this unhealthy competition or division in the church, Paul warned about this among the believers in 2 Corinthians 10:12, where he admonished that “We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise”. Interview with Pastor Clifford Ukpong (2024) revealed that:

The emphasis of some ministers nowadays is more on the quantitative increase and not the qualitative aspect which should be the main focus. Since everyone wants to be seen and heard, and not being so much bothered about the souls of men that are wallowing in iniquities. The reigning thing now as the result of competition is who is the most eloquent pastor or the G.O with biggest auditorium among others.

This has led to clashes between churches and personalities. There have been a lot of controversies/disagreements and contention between ministers. There is also an unhealthy competition for converts as each of the churches struggle to get their member. In so many cases some indigenous churches will not allow for evangelism, crusade or revival on their land because of the fear of losing their members to other churches. Moreover, there have been several cases of fraud, embezzlements and the likes by church founders. In fact, some churches are not accountable to their members on how the church money is being used.

Heresy/ Misinterpretation of the Scriptures

There have been seeming contradictions to what the bible is teaching and what some prayer houses and healing homes are teaching today. There are different doctrinal believes, different approach to the name of God, and they believe that the pastor, prophet, and evangelist is impeccable (cannot sin) as such some pastors do oppress the church members, some were asked to eat grass, some are to eat dead rat, ants, snakes etc., just to heal them from various diseases and to set them free from their bondages. One of the major effects of church proliferation is noise pollution. In fact, the rate at which churches cause harm and unpleasant environment for people today is alarming.

Conclusion

From the forgoing, it is pertinent to note that proliferation of prayer houses and healing homes in Onna LGA has brought more chaos and disadvantages than the expected gains that religion is expected to offer, this is because one of the purposes of religion is to bring succour to mankind but in our own idea and worldview it is relatively subjective. That is why recently through the media, some African preachers are seen as opportunists because it is believed that most of the founders of prayer houses and healing homes established them not because of any divine mandate, but because they see them opening as a business venture (Raphael, 2013). Most of these prayer houses and healing homes' founders are not interested in salvaging the ugly situation at hand as the good shepherd, but rather, they go on extorting money from the members both from the rich and the poor, those who are ignorant of the business of the so called men of God. However, there is no gainsaying the fact that prayer houses and healing homes could be a blessing to the people of Onna if properly managed and guided because they provide succor to the spiritual needs of people. For instance, Onna people have thronged to them for healing of incurable diseases of all descriptions, especially madness, misfortune, infertility, lack of success in businesses among others. What is required now from the founders of these houses and homes is to operate them in a way that will be able to change moral decadence of the people in other to reduce the corruption and atrocities that are prominent Onna LGA. This is because a situation, where by Bible teaching is used to emphasize material wealth as some of the founders do today, can easily abolish the Christian values or interest in the Bible. But sound teaching of the Bible can promote faith, hope, trust and sound doctrine.

Recommendations

- i. The Christian Council of Nigeria (C.C.N) and Christian association of Nigeria (CAN) should establish a registration centre for all the prayer houses and healing homes in Onna LGA and also issued guidelines to them on the modus operandi. They should equally monitor the activities of all the prayer houses and healing homes to avoid abuse of their activities.
- ii. Founders of prayer houses and healing homes should guide against commercialization of healing and prayer. They should heed to Jesus' teaching of "freely you received, freely, you must give".
- iii. The founders of prayer houses and healing homes should be properly trained on theological education for proper interpretation of the Bible and better dissemination of the gospel.

References

- Amucheazi, E.C. (1986). *Church and politics in eastern Nigeria, 1945-1966: A Study in Pressure group Politics*. Ibadan: Macmillan.
- Blau, P. (1964). *Exchange and Power in Social Life*. New York: John Wiley & Sons

- Brian, J. G. (2012). "Rising restrictions on religion: Context, statistics and implications". *International Journal of Religious Freedom*. 5. 1. 26-32.
- Cook, K. S., & Rice, E. (2003). "Social Exchange Theory". In J. Delamater (Ed.), *Handbook of Social Psychology* (pp. 53-76). New York: Kluwer
- Cook, K. S.; Emerson, R. M. (1978). "Power, Equity and Commitment in Exchange Networks." *American Sociological Review*. 43 (5): 721–739
- Dafiewhare, U.A.A. (2008). *The Proliferation of Churches in Nigeria: The Niger Delta Experience*. Ugheli: Jo-himp.
- Edet, V. B. (2020). "Historic-Phenomenological Evaluation of Christian Experience in the Threshold of Human Development in Nigeria: Experience from Ibesikpo Asutan in Akwa Ibom State", pp132-153 In: E. D. Essien (Editor) *Phenomenology of Religion and Spirituality*. IGI Publications, USA.
- Ekarika, P. J. (2014). *Uruan-Efik Essien Doupebe in Pre-History Heritage: Akwa Ibom Evolution*. Uyo: ICIDR Publishing House
- Ekechi, F.K. (1972). *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland, 1857-1914*. London: Frank Cass.
- Emesowum, C.K. (2007). *Doctrinal Conflicts in Christendom: Which way Forward*. Umuahia: Atlanta.
- Essien, A.M. (2010). "Proliferation of Churches: A Lee way to commercialization of Religion". *European Journal of Scientific Research*, 201, 4, 1-45.
- Freedom. 5. 455-457.
- Hasting, A. (1976). *African Christianity: An Essay in Interpretation*. London: Geoffrey Chapman.
- Iheanacho, N.N (2012). "A Critical look at Contemporary Nigeria Christianity". *Journal of Society for Research and Academic Excellence*.
- Iwe, N.S.S. (1991). *Socio-ethical issues in Nigeria*. Obosi: Pacific.
- Kalu, O.U. (1978). "Church Unity and Religious Change in Africa". In L. Fashola (Ed.). *Christianity in Independent African* (pp 33-40). Ibadan: University of Ibadan.
- Knapp, Mark L. (1978). *Social Intercourse: From Greeting to Goodbye*. New York: Allyn and Bacon.
- Lawler, E. J. (2001), An Affect Theory of Social Exchange. *American Journal of Sociology* 107(2), 321-352
- Lawler, E. J., & Thye, S. R. (2006). *Social Exchange Theory of Emotions*. Cornell University, ILR School
- Madu, J.E. (2003). *The Paradox of the "One" and the "Many" in Religion*. Nkpor: Globe.
- Makinde, N. (2007). "When People Lose their Jobs". *Daily Sun, Voice Nation Newspaper*, Sunday July 8 2007
- Mbefo, L.N. (2002). *The True Africa: Impulses of Self-affirmation*. Onitsha: Spiritan.
- Miller, Katherine (2005). *Communication Theories*. New York: McGraw Hill
- Ndiokwere, N.I. (1994). *The Nigerian Church Today and Tomorrow*. Vol.1: Prospects and challenges. Onitsha: Effective Key.
- Nmah, P.E. (2008). *Religion and Society in Africa*. Enugu: RABBONI.
- Nmah, P.E. (2010.). "Christian Missionaries and Socio-economic Development in Colonial West Africa, 1814-1960: A Challenge to Global Evangelism in the third millennium". In A.B.C. Chiegboka, T.C. Utoh-Ezeajugh & G. Udechukwu (Eds.). *The Humanities and Globalization in the Third Millennium* (pp. 240-247). Nimo: Rex Charles and Patrick.

- Nwadiador, K.L. &Umeanolue, I.L. (2013). "Materialistic gospel message in contemporary Nigerian Churches: A critique". *Journal of Religion and Human Relations*, 1, 5, 29- 44.
- Obiefuna, B.A.C. K.L and &Umeanolue I.L. (2015}. "Costs and Benefits of Proliferation of Christian Denominations in Nigeria". <http://dx.doi.org//10.4314/ujah.v17i1.2>
- Obiora, F.K. (1998). *The Divine Deceit in Religion*. Enugu: Optimal.
- Okafor, V.E. (2008). "The Noticeable Mushrooming of Prayer Groups and Churches". *Journal of Religion and Human Relations*, 1, 1, 97-99.
- Rapael, O. J. (2013). Church Proliferation in the Nigerian Society: An Effective Means of Evangelism? *Journal of Philosophy and Christian Studies*, Vol. 1 (1) 228- 250.
- Sidbe, Sempore (1993). "Popular Christianity in Africa", 35-56. In: Jenkinson, W. (Editor), *Trend in Mission Toward the Third Millennium*. Orbis Book, New York, 278p.
- Talbot, P. A. (1967). *The People of Southern Nigeria*. Frank Cass, London.
- Talbot, P. A. (1969). *Southern Nigeria*. Frank Cass, London.
- Trigg, R. (2012). "Religious Freedom in a Secular Society". *International Journal for Religious*
- Udo, E. U. (1983). *Who are the Ibibios?* Onitsha: Africana FEP Publishers.
- Ukpong, D. P. (2008). "En- Ecclesiology: The Church as an Encounter Community in Nigeria". *Journal of Religious and Cultural Studies*. Vol.VI, No. 1 Pp. 52-71
- Ukpong, D. P. (2008). *Nigerian Pentecostalism: Case, Diagnosis and Prescription*. Uyo: Fruities' Publication.
- Ukpong, D. P. (2019). *Heavenly Crucible: An Investigation of Contemporary Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*. Port Harcourt: Catholic Institution of West Africa.
- Ukpong, D. P. (2023). *God in the City: Theology for Integral Development*. Lagos: Paulines Publications West Africa.
- Uya, O. E. (1994). "Study in History and Culture: An Overview", pp19-25. In Peters, S.W (Ed), *Akwon Ibom State: The Land of Promise, A Compendium*. Gabumo Publishing Co, Lagos.