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THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS IMPLICATIONS OF THE ABUSE OF PROPHECY IN THE 21ST CENTURY PENTECOSTALISM IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

There has been so much shift in the prophetic tradition of the church in the 21st century Pentecostalism in Nigeria. These include a number of ritual practices and symbolisms that are totally deviant from the biblical Pentecostal standard. This appears disheartening, confusing and threatening to the Pentecostal Christian community. This research adopts a historical and survey methods to access these issues, and gathered data through various ways including interview, participant observation, books and online publications. The paper discovered that some of the neo Pentecostal prophets in Nigerian prophetic ministry are using prophecy as an ambience of extortion and commercialization, using simony to gain their desires. They use some obnoxious matrixes to capture the psyche of the unsuspected clients for their aggrandizement. This result in tears and sorrows rather than comfort, edification and exhortation for which prophecy was meant. This paper recommends proper hermeneutical engagement to salvage the church from this ignorance that is detrimental to the belief of the church on the death and the subsequent resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Keywords: Pentecostalism, Prophecy, Church, Abuse, Implications

Introduction

Prophecy is a much needed culture and gift in the church owing to its hydra headed functions of healing the sick, mending the broken hearted, giving hope to the hopeless, giving revelation to the blind, direction to the confused, and warnings to others against impending dangers amongst other things. It is equally an appreciable virtue in the society especially in African society. This is particularly true because, before the advent of the institutionalized religions (Christianity and Islam) on the shore of Africa, Africans had already experienced an undaunted, unflinching and unalloyed relationship with the supernatural of whom they sought enquiries of the future concerning farming, naming, famine, infertility (Mbiti 1996; Quarcoopome 1987; Folarin 2015).

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This is why it was very possible for the adaptation of the missionary religions by the Africans, because the contents of the new religions included the erstwhile practices of the primitive society (divination). Therefore, the idea of prophecy became a culture to the people up to the extent that no African will be comfortable doing anything blindly without seeking the face of the gods (Gehman 2013, Mbiti 1996). With this understanding however, some of the prophets who claim to be solution providers stop at nothing promising the unsuspected clients the needed solutions even when they themselves have little or no knowledge of the case at hand than personal imagination, a situation which is referred to as sick religiosity (Essien, 2017; 2023). Although, the truth remains that there are some prophecies that are truly genuine, yet the practice of fake prophecy has religiously found its way into the church system (Kunhiyop 2012), especially the neo Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria, with a view to defrauding the innocent and help-seeking members of the church instead of giving “comfort, edification and exaltation to the church” (George 2017; Edet 2021).

This development has brought untold consequences to the society, ranging from collapse of marriages, destruction of families, and separation of friendships to untimely death. Some under the guise of prophecy have taken an undue sexual advantage of people's spouses to the perils of their marital homes. Most parents-in-law are considered to be witches and wizards by prophecy, to the detriment of their families. In many instances, marriages are constituted by prophecy, without giving the intended couples a chance to assess their social, academic, religious, and medical compatibility before entering into marriage. The effect of this is usually broken marriages, leaving the innocent children at bare to face the menace of parental negligence, poor parenting and clinical vulnerability of giving birth to medically malfunctioned children like sicklers (SS). Now, in most cases, orthodox medication is sacrilegious, diseases like HIV/AIDS, Lassa fever, diarrhea, malaria, typhoid fever, tuberculosis, and the list, that could be well handled medically have been subjected to the whims and caprices of prophecy, thereby causing so many cases of untimely death, leading to greater number of orphans, widows and widowers prevalent in the Church, which inversely brings about an alarming rate of poverty in the society. Values like hard work and creativity have been relegated to the background: most people now wait for prophecy before they begin to engage themselves in any given venture in order to succeed in life. Some even go round seeking prophecy, synonymous to the divination of African Traditional Religion. This also brings about poverty in the church that results in the increase in social vices. It is safe to say also that the abuse of prophecy has orchestrated the incessant proliferation of ill-fated churches littered around the streets, in so much that any daydream of any member of the church, results in the establishment of a new church or healing centre, with a name that goes something like this, “Solution Centre”, “Mount of Healing”, “Mount of Deliverance”, and so on. What is done in some of these centres are not farfetched than faking of prophecy to enrich oneself. With this development, discipline in the church suffers a blatant fate because attempt to inflict sanction on any defaulter, results in the secession of the victim with his or her mortal cohorts to the peril of the mother church. These are the problems that this work seeks to address.

Concept of Prophecy

Prophecy is traditionally understood as the act of receiving and communicating messages believed to be divinely inspired. Prophecy is a divinely inspired utterance, revelation or interpretation of a prophet; a prediction of something to come; a "miracle of knowledge" that describes something future beyond human sagacity to foresee; the function or vocation of a prophet, specifically the inspired declaration of divine will and purpose (Ahlstrom, (2024). These

messages often pertain to future events, moral directives, or divine will. According to J. Blenkinsopp (1996), prophecy in the Hebrew involves individuals who are called to speak on behalf of God, delivering messages that range from warnings and judgments to promises of salvation and hope. These prophecies could be seen both in verbal or written forms.

Umaru V. (2023) notes that the term “prophecy” has been functioned and used in various texts in Ancient Near East. The functions of these prophecies or apparent prophecies are on eschatology or apocalyptic, social or religious critique, and communications from gods that have been commissioned.

Theologically, prophecy is considered a *charism* or spiritual gift granted by the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament, prophecy is described as a gift for edification, exhortation, and comfort (1 Corinthians 14:3, New International Version, George 2017, Edet 2021). Grudem (2000) opines that prophecy is “speaking what God spontaneously brings to mind,” emphasizing the role of the prophet as a conduit for divine communication. Biblically, prophecy represents the inspired word (message) of God, coming from God through a channel chosen by God (a prophet) for His people. It is a mediated message from God communicated to His people through human agents. Citing Udoette, Nmah and Nwadiolor (2011) opine that prophecy in Pauline context is a charism (extraordinary power granted by the Holy Spirit). Suffice it to say that for Pauline theology, charism constitutes God’s call, addressed to each and every Christian in view of the church, coupled with the ability to perform such services. Charisms are the principles of individualisation or differentiation of every Christian and so determine who plays what role in the Christian community, the body of Christ (*soma tou christou*). On this note, for Paul, “a Christian community without the charisms operative in its members would be unthinkable; it would no longer be like a living body, and hence no longer a body of Christ” (Nmah and Nwadiolor, 2011). It is within the context of Pauline’s theological reflection on charisms (1Corinthians 14: 12-14) that a discussion on prophecy and its functions is made available. Unlike tongues which are utterances of mysteries in the spirit (*mysteria en pneumatic*) meant for the unbelievers, Paul contends that *ho de propheteuon anthropos lalei* (he who prophesies to men) especially believers. Those who prophesy, speak to human beings for their moral up building, encouragement and consolation. Hence, prophecy has a rich variety.

Sociologically, prophecy can be viewed as a form of social critique and a means of addressing societal issues. Weber (1968) categorized prophecy as a type of charismatic authority where the prophet’s legitimacy and influence are derived from their perceived connection to the divine. This perspective highlights the social functions of prophecy to include its role in challenging the existing power structures and advocating for social justice (Bassey, 2023). Although this aspect of prophecy is no longer functional in Nigerian, because of the unprecedented influx of quackery and fraudsters in the church system, yet it was a useful tool in the history of nations like Nineveh (Jonah1:1); Israel(Jeremiah 7:20; Amos 1:1; Habakkuk 2:8), it was a guide to the prosperity of nations (Haggai 1:5-15), Agabus through the inspiration of the spirit predicted a severe famine on the Roman world (Acts 11:28). Quoting Chapell, Bassey (2023) remarks that the New Testament prophets inclusively challenged the unjust society, with a view of flushing out unrighteousness while enthroning justice and equity. The New Testament discusses socio-political roles of the prophets in combating gender discrimination, oppression, social and economic injustice, liberation pronouncement to the poor and the hopeless, condemnation of racism and ethical bias, religious hypocrisy and avarice et cetera. There is the role of prophecy as an agent of social change for which even the Old and the New Testaments prophetic enterprises were known.

Old Testament View of Prophecy

According to Muindi (2012), the phenomenon of prophecy in the context of the ancient Israelite faith and its ancient Near Eastern religious background was generally understood as the human transmission of divine messages, thereby revealing the divine will to humans. Although the phenomenon of prophecy is portrayed in the Old Testament in a variety of ways: preaching, when God uses the word in an unusual relevant manner and word of knowledge, when God gives an accurate word for a specific person or situation (Kendall 1996), yet, the aspect of intermediary transmission, or proclamation of divine messages to human audience, is generally viewed as the key characteristic of the Old Testament prophecy (Folarin 2021; Bassey 2023; Edet 2021; George 2017; Horton 2006 :219), thereby serving as a guide to the people in their socio-religious community. Thus, the flow of the prophetic intermediary direction is divine-to-human, and, for the betterment of man and his socio-religious environment. An alternative view of prophecy in ancient Israel and in the ancient Near Eastern milieu highlights the rational cognitive role of the prophet. As Palmer (2014:107) avers, the priest was the regular spiritual leader of Israel. But in spiritual emergencies, God raised up prophets. The prophets were the Lord's fire brigade, raised up in special times to put out spiritual fires. While the office of the priest was hereditary, the office of the prophet was based on God's call.

New Testament View of Prophecy

Prophecy in the New Testament is built upon its Old Testament foundations but introduces new dimensions and contexts, particularly with the advent of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the church. Thomas (1992) asserts that the phenomenon of prophecy observed in the New Testament Church is understood variously. Whereas some theological scholars espouse a dispensational approach which posits that prophecy was intrinsically related to the dispensation of the formation of the biblical canon, and therefore ceased with the formation of the canon, there is a general consensus in scholarship that there were continuing forms of prophetic manifestations in the New Testament incipient Church, some of which were essentially a continuation of the Old Testament prophetic forms. Notably, the manifestations of prophecy in the New Testament Church are best understood in the light of their background in Israel and in the mission of Jesus. The New Testament apostolic writings portray Jesus Christ as the ultimate revelatory presence of God (1 Timothy 2: 5; Hebrews 8: 6; 9:15; 12:24). The Apocalypse of John also depicts Jesus Christ as the ultimate revelation of God and that his revelatory presence constitutes the *charism* of the New Testament prophecy (Revelation 19:10). Hence, "the spirit of prophecy in Revelation 19:10 refers not to the person of the Holy Spirit, or a heavenly agent but to the charisma of the prophets" (Beckwith, 2001).

Muindi (2012) observes that a survey of the usage of the word "prophecy" in the books of the New Testament reveals that, of the One hundred and forty four (144) occurrences, One hundred and Twenty three (123) of them refer to Old Testament prophets, while the remaining occurrences refer to Jesus Christ, to John the Baptist, the incipient Church prophetic figures, such as Agabus (Acts 11: 28; 21:10), the prophets at Antioch (Acts 13:1-2), Judas and Silas (Acts 15:32), and daughters of the Evangelist Philip (Acts 21: 9). In addition, there are other references to prophetic manifestations among early church believers. For example, some disciples in Ephesus are reported to have prophesied when Paul placed his hands on them; "they spoke in tongues and prophesied" (Acts 19: 6). Nonetheless, all forms of New Testament church prophecy appear to be subsumed under the authority of Jesus Christ as the ultimate prophetic revelatory presence of God. The Early Church prophecy as gleaned from the New Testament texts appears to have been, characteristically, invasive prophetic manifestations in

congregational settings, though a few people appear to have functioned as prophets in the ministry of the early church (Forbes, 1995). However, the phenomenon of prophecy witnessed in the New Testament incipient church should, ideally, be visualized in terms of two modes: a temporal and authoritative apostolic canonical mode of prophecy in line with the Old Testament canonical prophecy, and a less authoritative but enduring form of congregational prophecy manifestations (Feldman 1990). The Apocalypse of John is portrayed as canonical prophecy in line with Old Testament canonical prophecy (Revelation 1:3; 22:18) as well as the other New Testament writings which are equated with “the other (Old Testament) scriptures” (2 Peter 3:15-16). However, congregational prophetic manifestations, such as were witnessed in the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 12-14), were viewed as a less authoritative form of prophecy which needed to be evaluated to determine whether the prophetic utterances were acceptable to the church or not (1 Corinthians 14:29; 1 Thessalonians 5:19- 21). That is a pointer to the discernment of prophecy in the 21st century church.

Prophecy in the 21st Century Pentecostalism of Nigeria

Essentially speaking, a number of activities have sprouted up and evolved in the church that were not invoke from the beginning of Pentecostalism. Arguably one may be tempted to adduce that the advancement in technology, education and civilization are some of the causes of the paradigm shift in the prophetic ministration of the church today, but one will also suffer a baleful impeachment for trying to justify spirituality with mundane things. As long as the Bible remains the standard for Christianity, every form of spiritual activity should draw its inference from it (bible). Meanwhile, the activities that are alien to the prophetic ministration of the church include:

- i. **Ceremonial Mode of Prophecy:** In Nigerian neo Pentecostalism today, prophecy has assumed a new status of operation such as a ceremonial mode of prophesying, especially in bringing out the susceptible client for people to acknowledge to prophetic prowess of the prophet. A situation that is completely foreign to the bible. Prophets assume invocative declaration of Jesus’ name as “magical” ascription. They instruct their followers to use the name of Jesus to drive out “illegal” satanic occupants and attackers in their lives. These include among other things demons; gods; spiritual husbands and wives; witches; sickness; satanic strongholds; poverty; enemies; bad luck; death and marital problems. Thus, feet stomping, clapping and pointing hands in the direction of perceived enemies are always accompanied with an unrelenting invocation of Jesus’ name, and the declaration the word “Amen” for a repeated number of times, just to create an atmospheric sensation of the acceptance of the radical and provocative prayers. However, the scripture strongly believes in the efficacy of the name of Jesus. But the strongest belief is that the name of Jesus is a strong tower, only for the righteous (Proverbs 18:10). It was not supposed to be used as a tool for exploitation, manipulation and commercialization.
- ii. **Dance Around Mode/Syndrome:** Many a time the prophets move among the congregation to reveal clients’ problems, and claim to have offered solutions to them. The prophets are always aided by assistants or prophets on training, who carry bottles of anointing oil, towel, and sometime bowls from which the prophets scoop and splash the water or anointing oil on the congregants. This practice according to Udoakang (*interview*) is for the eviction of demonic presence. The eviction of demonic presence is often accomplished by the raising up of arms, coupled with confessional declarations such as “You spirit of poverty, sickness, disease, bad marriage, shame, embarrassment, disappointment, et cetera, today as I raise my hands to heaven, I command you to leave me now; I command the fire of heaven to

consume you right now, I command you spirit of poverty to die by fire. Most notable of the incantations are the “shouting of Holy Ghost fire”, “Pleading of the blood of Jesus”, “invoking the name of Jesus”, and “shouting of Amen” for a given number of times, depending on the magnitude of the problem to be addressed. These are closely followed with ritual practices that are akin to what is obtained in traditional African shrines, very much different from the biblical conception of prophecy. Some of the prophets usually devote a large aspect of their so called “prophetic hours” for prophecies and visions expedition only, in addressing issues relating to spiritual warfare rather than on salvation, holiness and righteousness. Although, it is admissible that the concept of warfare finds its place in Pauline’s theology (2 Corinthians 10:3-6 and Ephesus 6:10-18), yet the maximum place it occupies in the Church today, however makes it worrisome.

- iii. **Run Round Mode (The *Utom* Mantra):** Some of the contemporary prophets believe that victory and freedom in Christ may be achieved through rituals of liberation: the sale of special anointing oil; blessed water; blessed herbal substances; deliverance (exorcism); dropping of olive oil into someone’s mouth during ministration; as a representation of Jesus blood; dropping of olive oil into drinking water for healing. Introduction of injunction leave of palm frond (*Ezieng*) for arrest of *Obot emana* (spiritual disturbances). Others do prescribe colour candle sticks, water, pieces of wrappers and colanuts for the assignment. Prevalence in most churches today include, covering of someone with wrapper in the presence of audience as a sign of liberation from death or captivity, to be free when uncovered. Breaking of olive oil bottle as a sign of covenant breakthrough and freedom from ancestral powers; introduction of buying of cloths and precious gift to the prophets as a remedy, uplift and change of status. Counselling of individual especially opposite sex by the prophet at privacy. Some even introduce the packing of sand from the church, asking the pastor to sit on bare floor or stand on the table, telling people (Congregation) to jump across the Holy Bible or stand on it, are the reasons why people are saved. The introduction of worldly music, like the *Ekpo* and *Ekpe* - Leopard (war songs) during ministration are common place. Although no music is worldly, but the lyrics (Matthew 2021), yet some forms of musical renditions in the church during prophetic ministration suggests an unbiblical collaboration between spirituality and carnality. Some forms of the *utom* assignment include using umbrella inside the church under which members are entering for divine coverage; taking people to the river to cast out demonic spirits; asking the prayer team to breathe inside water for people to drink and praying from one junction to another. The ritual of bathing a client during mid-night hours is usually performed on ladies and women in search of suitors and children respectively. Such ritual bathes are meant to cleanse client from influences of evil forces and human enemies whom they believe are responsible for delay of marriages and childlessness respectively. Similarly, the ritual of feet washing carries the symbolism of cleansing one’s “spiritual feet” from spiritual contaminations believed to be responsible for set-backs, misfortune and failures (Quayesi – Amakye 2015).

Findings of Abuse of Prophecy in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

To have a reliable information about the subject matter, a study was conducted in some the Assemblies of The Apostolic Church in Ikot Ekpene Field, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, as the first classical Pentecostal church in Nigeria (Paul 2014, Ukaoha 2013) to see how prophecy is used in the church, the following are a few of the findings:

- i. A prophetess had commanded the Pastor through prophecy to look for palm kernel oil, crude oil, *isana* leaves, new palm frond locally known as *ajei* and other items to be used in

- the healing prayers for a partial stroke patient, who suffered as a result of hypertension (Itoro 2019 *eye witness*).
- ii. A prophecy was said to have directed an Elder to anoint the vagina of a woman, who suffered from hydrolysis. The Elder was also supposed to infuse the anointing oil into the woman through the vagina for quick healing (Fransisca Matthew 2023 *personal interview*).
 - iii. A pregnant woman, who suffered from severe convulsion was delayed in the church, having been prayed for, for about 24 hours, she was advised to wait for more prophetic declarations. If not the presence of the District pastor, the story would have been a sad one. To the glory of God, the woman delivered of a bouncing baby boy at the hospital through the intervention of the pastor (Itoro 2021 *eye witness account*).
 - iv. A prophetess was suspended for prophesying to a woman she jointly gossiped the previous day on their way from the local market. It was reported that she prophesied exactly the matter they gossiped about the said woman. The prophecy became a case when members of the gossip crew made a standing ovation against it, as according to them, it is “what we discussed yesterday evening while returning from the market” (*Idongesit Etim 2024*).
 - v. A prophet was apprehended at a member’s compound, at midnight, on the expedition of burying a charm in the compound, so that he will come the following day to exhume it through prophecy and the *Utom mantra* exhibition (Itoro 2015 *eye witness*).
 - vi. During the labour for a child birth of a particular woman, there was a prophecy that they should bring a young palm fruit leave, *ajei*, and some other leaves to the Pastor, who would give it out to the spirits as injunction against their (spiritual) advances on the pregnant woman. But the Pastor refuted the prophecy, prayed for the woman and the baby was delivered safely without the observation of the prophetic directives (Udoakang 2024 *personal interview*).
 - vii. A married woman approached the pastor and confided in him that she was advised by prophecy to look for a genuine man of God and let him (the man of God) undress her, bath her and redress her with new pairs of cloth, for that would translate into the end of her sufferings. But the Pastor refuted the prophecy, warned, counseled and advised the woman on the right way of tapping God’s blessings (Udoakang2024 *personal interview*).
 - viii. A prophecy was said to have directed a woman to buy deliverance items to include snuff, local gin (kaikai), tobacco, cola nut and the likes, as items of appeasement and propitiation to the spirits of the departed members of the family, at their former (abandoned) compound locally known as *ndon*, who are suspected to be witched hunting members of the family. The pastor at this material time yielded both to the directives of the prophecy and the yearnings and plea of the woman. This is, however, not different from the prescriptions of an African Traditional Religious prophet (Udoakang 2024 *personal interview*).
 - ix. A pregnant woman who had a prolonged labour for child birth, at the church was advised by prophecy to mention her concubine without which she will not survive the labour. Adding that she was apprehended by the *ekpo nka agwo* deity, a deity in Annang land that is believed to be in charge of punishing adulterous women. The innocent woman out of anger mentioned her father as her first concubine and her husband as the second. Following the delay, misconstrued for infidelity by prophecy, the woman lost one of her twin babies at the hospital, got irritated by the obnoxious abuse of prophecy, and left the church for another till date (Eno Ekanem 2024, *exclusive interview*).

- x. A pregnant woman was advised by prophecy not to try going the hospital, keeping to this instruction, the woman became unconscious after a severe bleeding and died at the verge of considering the hospital (Uwem Igwe 2024, *personal interview*).
- xi. One Abraham had a rupture in the lower abdomen that could be treated in the hospital, but was advised that an attempt to operate on him in the hospital would mean the end of his life. Yielding to this prophecy, the parents took him round prayer houses till Abraham finally died (*eye witness*).
- xii. A prophet told one Mr. A, that he should hand over his car to him (the prophet) for six month without which he will die on an auto crash. As panic as the client would be, he handed over the car to the prophet. But unfortunately, the prophet while using the car for some time involved in a fatal auto crash, that merely considered his live, (Unyime Ekanem 2024, *personal interview*).
- xiii. A man was unconscious when he was brought to the church, and the prophet prophesied that he will not die, he advised that a hut should be built in their family compound presumably, for the ancestors, adding that immediately that is done, the man will resurrect, but the poor man died even before the hut was completed, (Peter Amos, 2025, *personal interview*).
- xiv. In another church programme prophet told one sister B, to suspend her foundation laying and hand over the plot of land to the prophet for the land was poisoned with some fetishes (juju), the lady reported to her family members, who advised her to ignore such prophecy; today she is happily living in the house she built on the land, against the prophecy, (Peter Amos, 2025, *personal interview*).
- xv. In another church session, a prophet told a lady that the prophet himself was her right husband, adding that if she refuses to marry him, she will never be married, but to the glory of God, the sister is happily married with three children to another man (Amos 2025, *personal interview*).
- xvi. A prophet prophesied to a man to reject his bride, adding that she was not his rightful wife, but today the man is happily married to his wife, that same woman (God's-power Umoh 2024, *personal interview*).
- xvii. A prophet told a lady that her womb was locked with padlock, that the only way to unlock the padlock and open her womb was to have divine penetration on her through the genital organ; to sleep with her. (Peter Amos 2024, *personal interview*).
- xviii. A prophet told one Mr. B to empty his account to the prophet's account to be free of spiritual attack, the man did, yet his attack persisted. (Sifon John 2024, *personal interview*).
- xix. A prophet prophesied to sister C that her mother in-law was a witch, but when the mother-in-law was brought to the same church, that same prophet said, her husband was about to kill her (Mary Edet 2024, *personal interview*).
- xx. A lady in a tarry-night programme was prophesied to by a prophet that her husband is impotent, adding that he was with divine anointing to get her pregnant. The lady refused such offer, to the glory of God, the lady is blessed with four children today, against the prediction of the prophet (Unyime Udo 2024, *Personal interview*).
- xxi. A prophet told one lady in the church who has reach menopause to buy seven bottles of olive oil and fasted for seven days, for the angel of the lord will visit her on the seventh day, then she will conceive. Little did she know that the prophet was also the angel; as desirous as the lady were, the prophet at the seventh day had a canal knowledge with her, even when she discovered the tricks, she still could not do anything than keep waiting for the fulfilment of the prophecy till date (Ini Okon 2024, *personal interview*).

- xxii. A prophet told a six month pregnant woman that she will put to birth in few days, and that what the doctor told her concerning Cesarean Section (CS) will not happen, when she has not yet gone to any hospital to meet with a doctor (Arit Akpan 2024, *personal interview*).
- xxiii. A prophet prophesied to a sister that she should donate her car to someone for an exchange of another car in a short time. But for a long time now, Sister Grace has not been given the car (Iniobong Asuquo 2024, *personal interview*).
- xxiv. A lady testify that she was asked to make sacrifice with item like goat, hen, before she could have a child and she did as was directed by the prophet, yet for a long time now, she has not yet gotten the child (Idongesit Umoh, 2025, *personal interview*).

The Socio-Religious Implications of the Abuse of Prophecy

The socio-religious implications of the abuse of prophecy could be discussed in a separate book of its own, but in the confinement of this work, the following grey areas shall be discussed:

- i. **Collapse of Marriages:** A chunk amount of divorce in some part of Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District, of Akwa Ibom State, are attributed to the wrong application of prophecy. According to the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) conducted on this subject, the collapse of some marital homes are caused by wrong application of prophecy. Some prophets and Prophetesses under the guise of prophecy have taken an undue sexual advantage of people's spouses, resulting in divorce. From the responses of many of the respondents, many marriages were instituted by prophecy, without giving the couples a chance to access their social, academic, religious, and medical compatibility. This according to the respondents brings about broken marriages, whenever they discover that the lapses in their compatibility is uncontrollable.
- ii. **Child Abuse:** Some children are miscreants today as a result of the divorce of their parents, occasioned by the abuse of prophecy. Some children who are sicklers (SS) and HIV/AIDS positive today are products of wrong application of prophecy, because their parents married blindly without some medical examinations.
- iii. **Untimely Death:** The result of abuse of prophecy in some families is always untimely death. Now, in most cases, orthodox medication is considered a sacrilege, some diseases like HIV/AIDS, Lassa fever, diarrhea, malaria, typhoid fever, tuberculosis, and the list, that could be well handled medically have been subjected to the directive of prophecy, thereby causing so many cases of untimely death, leading to greater number of orphans, widows and widowers prevalent in the society, which inversely brings about an alarming rate of poverty in the society.
- iv. **Proliferation of Social Vices:** It is ridiculous that values like hard work and creativity have been relegated to the background. Some people are going round seeking prophecy to help them know the kind of work to do and possibly how to start it. This also brings about poverty in the society that results in the increase in vices like criminality and prostitution.
- v. **Proliferation of Unhealthy Spiritual/Healing Homes:** It is safe to say also that the abuse of prophecy has orchestrated the incessant proliferation of ill-fated churches littered around the streets. The establishment of a new churches or healing centres, with a names like, "Solution Centres", "Mounts of Healing", "Mounts of Deliverance", and so on, is a product of prophetic abuse. This is usually a ploy to escape discipline in the mother church of some the prophets. However, this is why disciplines is lacking in the church today because attempt to inflict sanction on any defaulter, will result in the secession of the victim with his or her mortal cohorts to the peril of the mother church.

Some Possible Ways to Return to the Normalcy of True Prophecy

In the words of Grudem (1996), the abuse of prophecy in contemporary times has caused significant harm to individuals and religious communities. To address these issues and return to a more authentic and constructive practice of prophecy, several strategies can be employed. These strategies involve theological education, accountability measures, pastoral care, ethical standards, community engagement, responsible use of technology, and interfaith dialogue. This comprehensive approach aims at fostering discernment, integrity, and ethical practice in the exercise of prophetic gifts.

Theological Education

According to Mulholland (1975), theological education is seen as the systematic biblical and doctrinal teaching, both theoretical and practical that has as its purpose the preparation of the believer especially, the leader for the role of a special ministry in the church of Jesus Christ.” It is the education or teaching giving consciously to someone who is understudying to know more about God and his will to human kind, and the “process by which a person learns to know God personally, to love Him with all his mind, and heart, and to glorify Him with his whole being. This is subjecting the whole faculties of human personality in attempt to know more about God through rigorous learning, practices and disciplines (Matthew 2016, Gerber 1984). The importance of theological education should not be mitigated, as it holds the foundational doctrines and the sustenance of the future of the church. A robust foundation in theological education is essential for fostering authentic prophetic practice. Religious institutions and communities, according to Fee (2003), the church should prioritize teaching about the nature, purpose, and history of prophecy within their traditions.

Biblical Literacy and Studies

Closely related to theological education is Bible studies. A teaching base church cannot easily be misled by the unscrupulous elements of the society. This is why Jesus Christ, the founder of the church, devoted tremendous effort in teaching his audience (Matthew 4: 23; 9:39; 15:9; 21:23; 26:55; 28:20; Mark 14:49; Luke 13:10,22; 21:37; 23:5). The early church also saw the importance of teaching in the church and they made it a priority (Acts 5:25; 15:35; 18:11). Apostle Paul in his ministration toed to Christ’s steps and the result was mind boggling (Acts 28:31; Colossians 1:28). This research is not trying to underrate *prophetism*, rather that the church might be able to underscore the right applicability of it, with a view to giving it the right place it deserves as a functional religious activity. This includes studying the context and purpose of prophetic message in the Bible (Grudem, 2000). Providing comprehensive studies for leaders and laypersons on biblical principles related to prophecy will help restore the prime role of prophecy in the church. This includes understanding the role of prophecy in the Christian tradition and recognizing the characteristics of true prophetic messages (Yong, 2006).

Establishing Accountability Structures and Prophetic Oversight Teams

Creating accountability structures within religious communities is crucial to preventing the abuse of prophecy. These structures can help ensure that prophetic messages are tested and evaluated before being accepted. Forming teams within churches or denominations responsible for evaluating and overseeing prophetic messages. These teams should consist of mature, theologically trained individuals who can provide guidance and correction when necessary (Cartledge, 2018).

Peer Review Mechanisms and Pastoral Care/Counseling

Encouraging prophets to submit their messages to peer review by other respected leaders within the community. This process helps ensure that prophecies are weighed and tested in a communal setting before being disseminated widely (Wagner, 2000). Pastoral care and counseling can support individuals who have been harmed by prophetic abuse and guide communities toward healthier practices.

Recognizing Signs of Abuse and Providing Support and Healing to Victims of Manipulative Prophecies

Training pastors and church leaders to identify signs of spiritual abuse and manipulation and respond appropriately. Offering counseling and support to those who have been negatively impacted by false or manipulative prophecies. Helping individuals rebuild their faith and trust in the community is vital for their spiritual and emotional recovery (Garneau, 2018).

Promoting Ethical Standards such as Transparency and Honesty

Promoting ethical standards in the practice of prophecy is essential for maintaining the integrity and credibility of prophetic ministry. Encouraging transparency in the delivery of prophetic messages and honesty about the limitations of prophetic insight (Garneau, 2018).

Humility and Servanthood

Emphasizing that prophetic ministry should be carried out with humility and a servant's heart, rather than for personal gain or power. Ethical guidelines should stress the importance of serving the community and upholding moral integrity (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005).

Community-Based Approaches

Gaffin (1996) is of the opinion that fostering a community-based approach to prophecy can help mitigate abuse by emphasizing collective discernment and shared responsibility. Encouraging prophetic words to be shared and discerned within small groups or prayer circles, allowing for communal input and accountability is also necessary.

Open Dialogue and Feedback

Creating spaces for open dialogue and feedback within the community where individuals can express concerns and experiences related to prophetic messages. This practice helps build a culture of mutual trust and transparency (McClure, 2018).

- i. **Utilizing Technology Responsibly and Monitoring Online Prophetic Contents:** The rise of social media and technology presents both opportunities and challenges for the practice of prophecy. Responsible use of these tools is necessary to prevent the spread of false prophecies. Also, religious leaders and communities should monitor and evaluate prophetic content shared online, providing guidance on reliable sources and discouraging the spread of unverified messages (Johnson, 1991).
- ii. **Educational Campaigns and Engagement in Ecumenical Interfaith Dialogue:** Launching educational campaigns on social media to inform believers about the potential for abuse and how to discern trustworthy prophetic voices. These campaigns can provide tools and resources for critical engagement with online prophetic content (Campbell, 2010). Engaging in interfaith and ecumenical dialogue can provide broader perspectives on the practice of prophecy and foster mutual learning and accountability. Also, participating in conferences, workshops, and study groups with members of other faith traditions to learn about their approaches to prophecy and discernment (Keener, 1996).

iii. Collaborative Ethical Standards:

Working together with other religious communities to develop and promote ethical standards for prophetic practice. This collaboration can help create a unified front against the abuse of prophecy and promote best practices across traditions (Ware, 1993).

Conclusion

Prophecy has had a benevolent impact in the Church and the society, but its usage has been rigorously abused, in the 21st century Pentecostalism in Nigeria. This has attracted a baleful rift, argument and contemplation among some Christians of various denominational lines, as to what the prime meaning of prophecy seems to be, following the current trend of prophetic enterprise in the church. Although ritual (assignment) practices are not totally alien to biblical prophetism: yes, there are ritual practices in the bible, for example in the story of Abraham and the three visitors, the ritual of feet washing was observed (Genesis 18:4), Moses performed a kind of ritual in order to purify the waters of Merah and Elim for Isrealites (Exodus 15:25), Jacob poured oil on the pillar he erected following his dream at Bethel (Genesis 28:18). Jeremiah and Ezekiel observe some ritual practices in their prophetic ministries (Jeremiah 13. Ezekiel 24), Agabus appeared to have employed a form of ritual practice in his prophecy concerning Paul and the Jews of Jerusalem (Acts 21:10-11), and it appears legitimate for the church in the 21st century, yet as QuayesiAmakye (2015) observes, such beliefs and ritual practices have tendency of turning the church to unacceptable and unchristian conduct and practices. In particular, it can undermine Christian morality and ethics of patience, contentment, love, hard work, and honesty. 'Under such circumstances, the biblical view of miracles is sacrificed on the altar of religious naivety and personal convenience'. But more than that, even the essence of Christ's death and resurrection is likewise totally lost under such beliefs, ritual practices and symbolism. What emerges instead is a situation in which Christians have become more of miracle – seekers than fruits – bearers. Therefore, this research recommends that proper hermeneutical engagement be done to salvage the church from this mediocrity, and allow the church to flow in the same pace and grace with the early church, as the bible was, is, and will continue to be the standard of judgment for the church and the society.

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