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Article

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### SACRED SPACES AND SACRED ECONOMIES: COMPARATIVE EVIDENCE FROM CAC'S BABALOLA MEMORIAL CAMP AND RCCG'S REDEMPTION CAMP IN NIGERIA

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#### Abstract

Sacred sites in Nigeria are no longer only loci of spiritual meaning; they increasingly function as engines of informal economic activity. Yet, scholars have emphasised macro-level outcomes (roads, housing, infrastructure) while neglecting comparative, micro-level evidence on who benefits, by how much, and under what conditions. This study addressed that gap through a comparative analysis of the Christ Apostolic Church's Ayo Babalola Memorial Camp (Ikeji-Arakeji) and the Redeemed Christian Church of God's Redemption Camp (Mowe). A mixed descriptive design was employed, drawing on questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus-group discussions with visitors, vendors, transport operators, and key informants (N≈360), combining primary fieldwork at CAC (2025) with harmonised secondary data for RCCG. Religious Economy Theory (RET) provided the theoretical frame, treating camps as actors in a competitive spiritual-economic marketplace. Findings reveal that both camps generate substantial but uneven economic benefits for informal actors. During camp week, CAC vendors and operators record income rises from ₦10,000–₦20,000 to ₦21,000–₦100,000, while RCCG counterparts achieve far higher earnings, with 60% making ₦100,000–₦200,000 and 40% above ₦200,000. Both camps enhance livelihoods and visitors' spending, yet shared challenges persist, notably traffic congestion, sanitation issues, and price inflation, reflecting divergent scales of sacred economies. The study argued that Nigerian sacred spaces operate as competing "firms" in a religious market, with institutional scale and character shaping economic outcomes. It recommends that policymakers and camp managers treat religious camps as development partners by improving transport, sanitation, vendor regulation, inclusion, and sustainable economic planning.

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**Keywords:** Sacred Spaces, Sacred Economy; Religious Economy Theory (RET), Faith-Based Tourism, Nigeria.

### **Introduction**

Sacred sites are fundamental to every religious tradition, serving as loci of meaning for the religious man. The religious experience, as Mircea Eliade (1959) puts remains incomplete without attachment to a specific space where the divine once manifested theophany. Classic examples such as Moses and the burning bush shows the enduring relationship between religious memory and sacred geography. The discourse on sacred sites has shifted from the traditional notion. It is important to state, here, therefore that sacred sites are no longer conceived solely as hubs where the injured, sick, weak individuals seek out spiritual solace. They have also become physical sites of attraction, tourism, and economic activity. Recent scholarship like Ezenagu, Layefa, Okpoko, and Okpoko (2022) explored sacred spaces like the Redemption Camp, Osun-Osogbo Grove, and NASFAT Camp to show that ritual performances constituted the primary attraction, though faith-based tourism remains underdeveloped due to weak packaging. Similarly, Onnoghen, Okpo, and Usang (2023) demonstrated how religious festivals in Calabar, a region in south-south of the country, drive economic development, with direct impacts on hotels, restaurants, and transport sectors. From the aforementioned studies, it is quite clear that sacred sites in Nigeria are increasingly recognised as engines of socio-economic activity. Olukole (2022) examination of residents' perceptions of religious tourism at the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) Redemption Camp showed much gains in infrastructure development, job creation, and improved living standards, while also noting challenges such as traffic congestion and pollution. Similarly, Adejimi and Aremu (2019) showed that commercial, hospitality, and educational institutions within the camp sustain its economy and provide spillover benefits to neighbouring communities. Ukah (2016), analysing the political economy of prayer camps, documents of how Redemption Camp is evolving into a religious city that shapes urban planning and real estate development in Nigeria.

Despite these valuable contributions, scholarship has tended to emphasise macro-level outcomes such as roads, schools, banks, and housing, alongside residents' perceptions of improved quality of life or externalities like congestion and environmental strain. What remains underexplored are the micro-level aspects of how economic activities are generated, shared, and sustained during religious gatherings. Few studies provide systematic comparisons between different categories of camps. For example, denominational memorial sites versus mega-Pentecostal cities using matched indicators like vendor income, transport earnings, and visitor expenditure. The informal economy, including okada riders, petty traders, and seasonal workers, is especially neglected, with limited attention given to before-and-during event income comparisons. Moreover, little research has addressed how camp size, institutional structure, and the frequency of religious events shape the scale and sustainability of these economic benefits. This study addresses these gaps by offering a comparative investigation of two significant Nigerian sacred spaces: the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) Babalola Memorial Camp in Ikeji-Arakeji, which is an annual denominational pilgrimage site, and the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) Redemption Camp in Mowe, a permanent and expanding Pentecostal city. In doing so, it contributes to global debates on religion and development by generating fine-grained empirical evidence on who benefits, how much, and under what conditions. Practically, the findings hold relevance for policymakers, religious institutions, and local communities by identifying ways to harness the economic opportunities of religious conventions while mitigating challenges such as

congestion, environmental strain, and uneven benefit distribution. Hence, this study will engage different sections including literature review, theoretical framework, methodology and findings to inform its readers.

### **Literature Review: Sacred Places and Sacred Spaces**

Interrogating the literature is very germane at this point, especially on the subject matter of sacred places. The Sacred places, across religions, embody the intersection of the spiritual and the material. They are understood as sites of divine encounter, memory, and ritual, but also as spaces increasingly implicated in tourism, economy, and social change. The subject matter of discuss here has also been of interest to numerous scholars within Africa and even beyond. For some erudite scholars, sacred places assume two dualities. First, as tourist centre and second as spiritual hubs. Ezenagu, Layefa, Okpoko, and Okpoko (2022) illustrated this duality in their study of sacred spaces such as the Redemption Camp, Osun-Osogbo Grove, and NASFAT camp. They found that ritual performances remain the primary attraction for visitors, yet faith-based tourism in these contexts is underdeveloped due to weak packaging and marketing. In a similar vein, Ezenagu and Okpoko (2022) looked at how faith-based events generate employment and enhance visibility for sacred sites in Southwest Nigeria but argue that poor infrastructure reduces their overall potential. These studies collectively establish that while sacred sites in Nigeria possess strong ritual and spiritual draw, their economic potential remains hindered by inadequate structures. This argument aligns with Benson (2013), who observed that visitors to sacred sites in Southwest Nigeria often encountered infrastructural deficits, especially in waste management and physical facilities. Likewise, Nwachukwu (2022), in studying Igbo shrines, identified them as heritage tourism assets but emphasized that they remain underdeveloped and under-promoted. Here, we can see that these studies suggest that inadequate planning and infrastructure serve as recurring constraints, limiting sacred spaces from evolving into sustainable tourism hubs. In addition, Etuk (2024a) provides an emic analysis of Ibibio indigenous economic systems, revealing how spiritual, cultural, and economic activities were historically intertwined in ways that shaped community life, which aligns with Deopa and Rinaldo's (2023) argument that African traditional religious values function as informal environmental regulators by preserving forests and restricting exploitation. Together, these studies suggest that sacred sites, whether indigenous or Christian, have historically functioned as engines of socio-economic life.

Onnoghen, Okpo, and Usang (2023) extended the discussion by examining the case of Calabar religious festivals. The researcher showed that sacred events attract both domestic and international tourists, producing significant ripple effects across hospitality, transport, and restaurant sectors. However, weak government involvement constrains sustainability. Ele (2021) took interest on a broader economic lens, describing religion as "Nigeria's hidden tourism economy," particularly for its spillover effects on small and medium enterprises, while calling for robust tourism policy reform. Both perspectives reinforce the economic relevance of sacred sites but reveal institutional weaknesses in governance and policy. Globally, studies also confirm the need for careful management of sacred economies. Xie and Lai (2023), in the Asian context, examined Hindu and Buddhist heritage sites, emphasizing the importance of balancing visitor management with the preservation of sacredness. In addition, Acosta (2023), on pilgrimage shrines, further identified varied motives ranging from spiritual, cultural, and social as factors that drive pilgrimage, while noting increasing youth interest. These comparative insights place the universality of the sacred economic tension, where growth in visitor numbers often risks

undermining the spiritual essence of the site. Scholars have warned of “profane encroachment” within sacred places. For example, Olurotimi (2024) argued that sacredness in Southwest Nigeria is increasingly compromised by the rise of commerce within worship compounds, thereby calling for clearer boundaries to preserve spiritual integrity. Similarly, Ezenagu (2022) underscored how ritual performances and indigenous cosmologies attract tourists, but poor marketing and commercialization distort the spiritual essence. These critiques draw attention to the fragile balance between commodifying sacredness and retaining authenticity.

By contrast, some scholars highlighted the positive environmental implications of sacredness. Deopa and Rinaldo (2023), studying African Traditional Religion, found that sacred beliefs contributed to increased forest cover and acted as informal regulators of resource use. In similar fashion, Ngoka, Chukwu, and Ume (2024) mapped sacred groves in Abia North and emphasized their cultural and ecological significance, though lamenting their low tourism visibility. Complementing these, Isaac, Oripeloye, and Adejo (2024) argued that faith itself can be harnessed as a key driver of environmental stewardship and sustainable development in Nigeria, reinforcing the idea that religion acts not only as a moral compass but also as a tool for ecological responsibility. Taken together, these works broaden the understanding of sacred spaces as both ecological assets and informal systems of conservation. In the Nigerian Christian context, the rise of Pentecostal camps demonstrates another dimension of sacred space evolution. Ukah (2016) conceptualized the RCCG Redemption Camp as an “urbanizing sacred space,” showing how prayer camps influence urban planning, land development, and the real estate market. In a historical parallel, Etuk (2024b) demonstrated that missionary stations established by Mary Slessor in Ibibioland between 1876 and 1915 functioned not only as centres of evangelism but also as nodes of economic exchange, reinforcing the long-standing integration of religion and economy in Southern Nigeria. This demonstrates that the economic role of sacred sites in Nigeria is not a recent development, but rather one with deep historical antecedents. In similar vein, Olulowo and Oluwarinde (2022) link Pentecostalism to the growth of informal urban economies and shifts in consumption patterns through the prosperity gospel, with RCCG and CAC serving as primary case studies. These works situate sacred camps not merely as religious sites but as socio-economic and political actors shaping Nigerian modernity.

Scholarly research on sacred economies revealed that religious sites and practices are not only spiritual locations but also dynamic economic systems that shape material life and social relations. In historical contexts, sacred economies were integral to religious institutions’ survival and social influence, as seen in medieval Chinese Buddhist monasteries where monastic landholdings, donation practices, and exchange of goods for salvation produced sustained material infrastructures closely linked to religious authority and communal life (Walsh, 2010). Similarly, the concept of an *economy of the sacred* highlighted how ritual objects and devotional practices have economic value beyond mere symbolism, as seen in German Catholic pilgrimage economies where pilgrims’ procurement of sacred souvenirs mediated spiritual presence and contributed to local religious markets (Doney, 2014). The sacred economy also spans contemporary socio-economic processes in Thailand, where the worship of sacred beings has become intertwined with economic uncertainty, generating new forms of wealth accumulation, risk transformation, and livelihood strategies in neoliberal contexts (Malangpoo, 2023). At a theoretical level, analyses of ancient Mediterranean religion situated sacred economies within broader frameworks of symbolic and spatial production, emphasizing that religious consumption, communication, and spatial

practices cannot be reduced to monetary transactions alone but are inherently embedded in cultural and communicative economies (Rüpke, 2022).

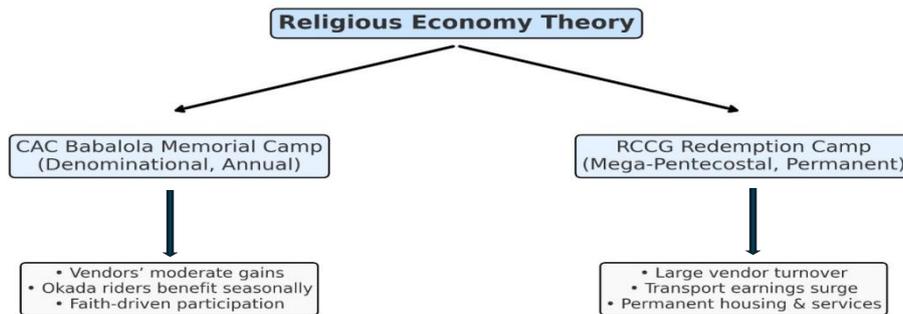
We can therefore argue here, that the reviewed literature converges on the fact that sacred spaces are multifaceted: they are sites of ritual attraction, drivers of local and national economies, and even informal environmental regulators. Yet, several gaps persist. First, most studies emphasize either infrastructure deficits (Benson, 2013; Ezenagu & Okpoko, 2022), tourism potentials (Ele, 2021; Onnoghen et al., 2023), or ecological implications (Ngoka et al., 2024; Deopa & Rinaldo, 2023; Isaac et al., 2024), without connecting these dimensions in a comparative framework. Second, while urbanizing camps such as RCCG Redemption Camp are richly studied (Ukah, 2016), denominational memorial sites like CAC's Babalola Memorial Camp remain underexplored in terms of their socio-economic roles. Third, empirical studies seldom disaggregate who benefits most from sacred economies, informal actors such as street vendors, transport operators, and seasonal workers remain largely invisible. Finally, there is little attention to comparative dynamics between different types of sacred camps (Pentecostal megacamps versus denominational memorial sites) and how their institutional structures affect the depth and sustainability of economic gains. Thus, the existing scholarship underscores the profound significance of sacred spaces in shaping spirituality, economy, and environment. However, the absence of fine-grained, comparative, and distributional analyses leaves critical gaps that this study seeks to address by examining the socio-economic dynamics of CAC's Babalola Memorial Camp and RCCG's Redemption Camp in Nigeria. The next section will consider the theoretical framework to place the study in scholarly context.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study adopts Religious Economy Theory to place the study in scholarly context. Religious Economy Theory (RET) was developed by sociologists Rodney Stark and colleagues to explain religious behaviour and institutional growth in terms of supply and demand dynamics. RET proposes that religion operates within a competitive marketplace, where individuals make rational choices based on perceived costs and benefits, while organisations adapt their structures and offerings to attract and retain adherents (Strulik, 2016; Pennycook, 2014). In this model, individuals seek spiritual fulfilment, social belonging, and material opportunities, while weighing these against costs such as financial contributions, behavioural restrictions, or travel burdens. RET also assumed that competition fosters diversity and innovation in religious landscapes, as groups tailor their services to meet the varying needs of their followers. Applying RET to the Nigerian context shows how sacred sites operate as both spiritual centres and economic marketplaces. Religious camps such as the RCCG Redemption Camp and CAC's Babalola Memorial Camp offer adherents not only opportunities for worship and ritual participation but also avenues for economic engagement through trade, transport, and hospitality. Visitors, residents, and vendors rationally calculate the benefits of attending or participating in these events such as spiritual renewal, income generation, networking against the inconveniences of traffic, high costs, or congestion. The persistent popularity of these camps suggests that for many, the perceived benefits outweigh the costs, a pattern consistent with RET's predictions about religious participation in competitive environments (Strulik, 2016).

RET also helps to explain the institutional differences observed between RCCG's Redemption Camp and CAC's Babalola Memorial Camp. RCCG has strategically expanded its offerings, universities, banks, housing estates, and hotels thus, transforming its camp into a permanent religious city that appeals to both national and transnational audiences (Ukah,

2016; Adejimi & Aremu, 2019). This diversification can be interpreted as organisational innovation in response to religious market competition, ensuring that the camp provides a wide array of both spiritual and material benefits to adherents. By contrast, CAC's camp retains a denominational and memorial character tied to the legacy of Apostle Joseph Ayo Babalola, attracting a loyal base of followers during annual conventions but at a comparatively smaller scale. RET suggests that this reflects niche-market positioning, where CAC maximises religious and economic benefits within its denominational boundaries rather than competing directly with mega-Pentecostal institutions.



**Fig 1:** Diagram linking Religious Economy Theory with CAC and RCCG camps (Source: Researcher's construct).

### **Methods/Materials**

This study adopted a comparative case study design to explore the socio-economic significance of two major religious convention camps in Nigeria: the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) Babalola Memorial Camp at Ikeji-Arakeji, Osun State, and the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) Redemption Camp at Mowe, Ogun State. These sites were selected for their contrasting profiles: CAC as a denominational memorial ground attracting annual pilgrimages and RCCG as a transnational Pentecostal megacity hosting monthly Holy Ghost Services. The study population comprised visitors, residents, vendors, transport operators, and key stakeholders such as camp managers and local officials. A total of 360 respondents were engaged across the two sites, distributed as 100 visitors/residents, 50 vendors, 50 transport operators, and 5 key informants at each camp. Data were generated through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). Questionnaires were administered to vendors and visitors to collect information on demographics, spending patterns, livelihood impacts, and perceived challenges. Semi-structured interviews targeted transport operators and key informants to capture detailed perspectives on income flows, infrastructural demands, and management practices. FGDs involving 6–8 participants each were organised among vendors, residents, and youths to explore collective experiences. Primary data for CAC were collected through fieldwork in 2025, while RCCG data were drawn from published studies and reports (e.g., Ukah, 2011; Oni, 2019; Adeboye, 2017), which were harmonised with the CAC dataset for comparability.

The data were analysed using a mixed descriptive approach: quantitative responses were summarised in frequency tables and percentages, while qualitative narratives were thematically coded into causes of economic change, perceived benefits, and challenges. Ethical protocols were strictly observed, including informed consent, voluntary participation, and anonymity through coded identifiers (e.g., V-CAC-01 for a vendor). Sensitive information

such as income was collected in ranges to reduce discomfort. Reliance on secondary sources for RCCG was explicitly acknowledged to avoid misrepresentation. This combined approach ensured methodological rigour and provided a reliable basis for comparing the two sacred spaces as engines of local economic transformation.

### **Study Contexts: The Camps and Sacred Spaces**

CAC's Ayo Babalola Memorial Camp The Ayo Babalola Memorial Camp at Ikeji-Arakeji holds a significant place in the collective memory and spiritual practice of the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) and Nigerian Christianity. Its prominence stems from the legacy of Apostle Joseph Ayo Babalola, whose 1930 revival at Oke-Oye, Ilesa is widely recognised as foundational to the CAC and a pivotal moment in the rise of indigenous *Aladura* Christianity in Nigeria (Christ Apostolic Church North America, n.d.). Babalola's ministry characterised by prophetic visions, healings, and widespread conversions helped shape the revivalist ethos that continues to influence Pentecostal practice in the country. Sacred pilgrimages to sites associated with Babalola, including Odo-Owa—his birthplace and the location of his prophetic well—reflect the sacralisation of geography in the CAC tradition and contributed to the spiritual significance of later church sites. Oral historical accounts within the denomination maintain that the location where the current camp stands is where the young Babalola received his divine call into ministry, reinforcing the site's spiritual authority. While the spiritual importance of the camp derives from Babalola's legacy, the formal establishment of the Ayo Babalola Memorial Camp is widely attributed to Pastor Isaiah Ogunbomehin. Ogunbomehin is credited with identifying, securing, and initiating the development of the site, transforming it from a wooded tract into a structured camp that would become central to CAC conventions and gatherings. Coverage by *Church Times Nigeria* on the inauguration of the Pastor Isaiah Ogunbomehin Foundation notes Ogunbomehin's instrumental role in founding what has grown into the CAC Joseph Ayo Babalola Memorial Miracle Camp in Ikeji-Arakeji (Anonymous, 2024). Furthermore, reporting in *CAC World News* summarises historical details of Ogunbomehin's life and confirms that he was the key figure behind the camp's development, stating that "Pastor Isaiah Ogunbomehin... was the one God used to discover Christ Apostolic Church, Babalola International Miracle Camp, Ikeji-Arakeji after the great Apostle slept in the Lord" (Bankole, 2019).

Nigerian Christian discourse often frames Ogunbomehin's contribution as a continuation of Babalola's prophetic mission. Events such as the annual conventions, evangelistic campaigns, and other denominational gatherings held at the camp have led many adherents to view the location as a spiritual locus associated with divine encounter, renewal, and deliverance. Following his death on July 21, 2019 at age 81, Ogunbomehin's legacy has been preserved through foundations and initiatives established in his honour that sustain the camp's mission and humanitarian vision (Bankole, 2019). In its contemporary expression, the Ayo Babalola Memorial Camp functions as both a religious and socio-economic hub. Regular programmes—including youth conferences, women's conventions, assemblies for children and teenagers, and annual gatherings for evangelists, prophets, and church planters—are held at the site. These events often run multiple sessions per day and attract worshippers from across Nigeria and the international diaspora (Bankole, 2025). Beyond its spiritual significance, the influx of pilgrims fosters significant local economic activity. Vendors, book sellers, transport operators, hoteliers, and artisans benefit from increased trade, while the host community experiences heightened demand for services, infrastructure, and temporary employment. In this sense, the Ayo Babalola Memorial Camp operates both as a sacred religious landscape and a catalyst for informal economic

development, embodying the intersection of religion, collective memory, and community growth within Nigerian Christianity (Bankole, 2025; Anonymous, 2024)



**Fig II:** The photograph was taken during the Good Women Conference 2025 at the CAC camp

### **RCCG's Redemption Camp**

The Redemption Camp of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), situated along the Lagos–Ibadan Expressway in Mowe, Ogun State, is today regarded as one of Africa's most expansive religious cities. Once a sparsely inhabited area infamous for highway robbery, the site was acquired and developed under the leadership of Pastor Enoch Adejare Adebayo beginning in the early 1980s, and has since grown into a sprawling spiritual and socio-economic landscape. According to Pastor Adebayo, the land that became the Redemption Camp was originally dense wilderness and a haven for criminals before the church's presence reshaped its identity and usage in alignment with its vision for a "City of God." Adebayo has repeatedly recounted how divine guidance and faith overcame the early material and environmental challenges associated with the site's establishment (Bisi Daniels, 2018; Bankole ABE, 2024). The camp, now more commonly referred to as Redemption City, spans approximately 2,500 hectares following the formal issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy by the Ogun State Government on August 4, 1998. Over the decades, what began as a religious campground has transformed into a multifunctional urban settlement with residential estates, worship facilities, infrastructure, schools, hospitals, banks, and civic services, effectively functioning as a self-sustaining community (Anonymous, 2024).

Scholars studying religious urbanism frame Redemption City as a distinct example of religious space integrated with urban infrastructure, a phenomenon where sacred landscapes intertwine with economic and social systems to produce what some term a "sacred city." This development pattern exemplifies how large Pentecostal organisations extend their religious influence into the material conditions of everyday life, restructuring space to serve both devotional and civic functions (Adejimi & Aremu, 2019). The camp's spiritual significance is especially evident during major worship gatherings. The Annual Holy Ghost Congress and monthly Holy Ghost Services continue to draw millions of worshippers from across Nigeria and abroad, reinforcing Redemption City's role as a major pilgrimage and worship hub within global Pentecostalism. These convocations provide regular occasions for collective devotion, spiritual renewal, and communal identity formation among adherents, with extensive crowds participating in rituals, prayers, and sermons throughout the events.

Beyond its religious function, Redemption City drives considerable economic activity within the local and regional context. During peak gatherings, vendors, hoteliers, transport services, artisans, and informal traders benefit from increased demand for goods and services, while surrounding communities experience growth in real estate opportunities, retail trade, and hospitality services. This economic spill-over illustrates how religious tourism and large-scale spiritual events contribute to local economies, even as challenges such as environmental strain, traffic congestion, and regulatory oversight persist (Adejimi & Aremu, 2019). Symbolically, Redemption City operates as the global nerve centre of the RCCG’s missionary and outreach mandate, embodying the expansive vision articulated by Pastor Adeboye. Its evolution from a humble camp into a major urbanised religious centre demonstrates the capacity of faith institutions to shape social space in ways that intersect spiritual meaning with tangible development outcomes. By integrating religious ritual, economic vitality, and infrastructural growth, Redemption City exemplifies a distinctive model of mega-Pentecostal spatial production that continues to influence both ecclesial practice and urban studies in Nigeria and beyond.



**Fig III:** The photograph was taken during the Holy Ghost Convention 2024 at the RCCG camp.

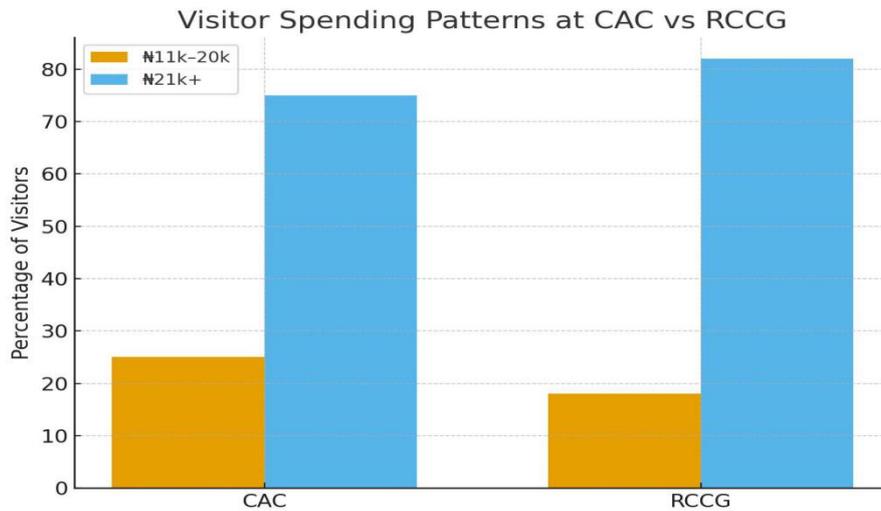
**Sacred Spaces- Sacred Economies Nexus**

**Table 1.** Distribution of Respondents (Visitors + Residents) by Social Status, Livelihood and problems encountered, N= 200

Variable	CAC (n=100)	RCCG (n=100)
Status	Visitors = 72% Residents = 28%	Visitors = 80% Residents = 20%
Age (Years)	21–40 yrs = 32% 41–60 yrs = 48% 60+ yrs = 20%	21–40 yrs = 45% 41–60 yrs = 40% 60+ yrs = 15%
Spending (₦)	₦11,000–20,000 = 25% ₦21,000+ = 75%	₦21,000+ = 82% ₦11,000–20,000 = 18%
Livelihood improved by camp	Yes = 85% A little = 10% No = 5%	Yes = 90% A little = 7% No = 3%
Problems experienced	High prices = 45% Traffic = 20% Sanitation = 20% Others = 15%	Traffic = 50% Sanitation = 25% High prices = 15% Others = 10%

**Sources:** Field work and RCCG data adapted from Ukah (2008), Adedibu (2016), and Afolabi (2015).

**Interpretation:** Table 1 shows both camps are predominantly visitor-oriented (CAC visitors 72%, RCCG 80%), with the majority in economically active age groups and higher average spending at RCCG (₦21,000+: CAC 75% vs RCCG 82%); correspondingly, most respondents report improved livelihoods (CAC yes 85%; RCCG yes 90%). Practically, this indicates that pilgrimage fuels demand for goods and services and that RCCG’s larger, more transnational attendance amplifies per-capita spending and multiplier effects; however, the types of negative externalities differ — CAC respondents cite high prices most (45%) while RCCG respondents emphasise traffic (50%) — revealing that scale and infrastructure shape how sacred economies benefit and burden hosts.



**Fig IV:** Status of respondents (visitors vs. residents) at CAC Babalola Memorial Camp and RCCG Redemption Camp.

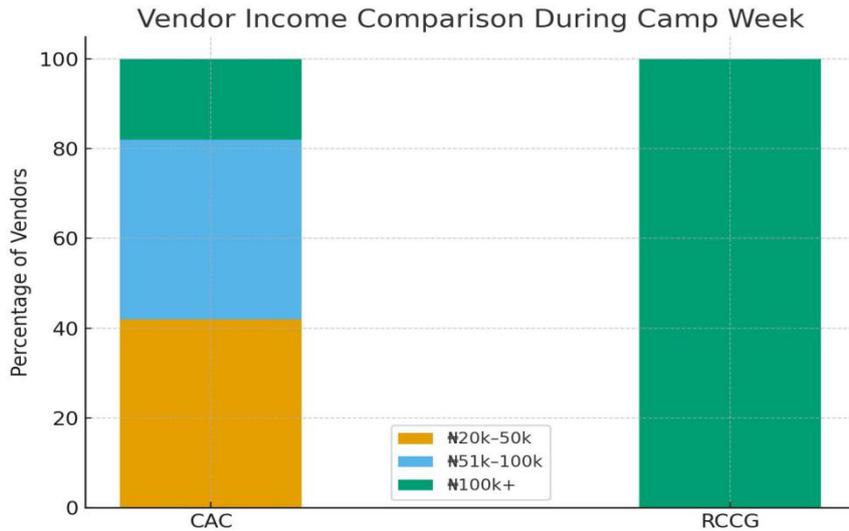
**Interpretation:** Both camps attract predominantly middle-aged visitors. Average spending is higher at RCCG, consistent with its larger and more transnational attendance. At CAC, high prices were the most reported problem, while at RCCG, traffic congestion dominated complaints.

**Table 2.** Distribution of Camp activities and income, N= 100

Variable	CAC (n=50)	RCCG (n=50)
Main goods sold	Clothes = 40%; Books = 20%; Drinks = 10%; Food = 5%; Others = 25%	Food = 35%; Clothes = 25%; Accommodation rentals = 20%; Books & religious items = 15%; Others = 5%
Normal week income	₦10,000–20,000 = 62%; ₦21,000+ = 38%	₦15,000–25,000 = 50%; ₦26,000+ = 50%
Camp week income	₦21,000–50,000 = 42%; ₦51,000–100,000 = 40%; ₦100,000+ = 18%	₦100,000–200,000 = 60%; ₦200,000+ = 40%
Extra helpers hired	Yes = 28%; No = 72%	Yes = 65%; No = 35%
Lasting benefits	New customers = 85%; None = 10%; Not sure = 5%	New customers = 92%; None = 8%

**Sources:** Field work and RCCG data adapted from Adedibu (2016).

**Interpretation:** Table 2 reveals a clear differentiation in vendor economies: CAC vendors concentrate on clothes (40%) and books (20%), earn modest normal-week incomes (majority ₦10k–20k) and see moderate camp-week boosts, whereas RCCG vendors are more service-diverse (food 35%, accommodation rentals 20%) and report much larger camp-week turnovers (60% in ₦100k–200k band). RCCG’s higher rate of hiring extra helpers (65% vs CAC 28%) shows stronger short-term employment multipliers and organizational complexity; both camps, however, register durable customer gains (>85%), indicating that sacred events create lasting market linkages beyond one-off spikes.



**Fig V:** Vendors’ camp-week income distribution at CAC Babalola Memorial Camp and RCCG Redemption Camp.

**Interpretation:** Vendors at RCCG report significantly higher turnover and more frequent hiring of extra hands compared to CAC. However, both camps generate lasting benefits in terms of expanded customer bases.

**Table 3.** Transport Operators

Variable	CAC (n=50)	RCCG (n=50)*
Normal trips/day	5–10 trips = 50% 11–20 = 30% 20+ = 20%	10–15 trips = 40% 16–25 trips = 35% 25+ trips = 25%
Camp week trips/day	20–30 trips = 45% 31–40 = 35% 41+ = 20%	40–50 trips = 50% 50+ = 30% 30–39 = 20%
Normal income/day	₦2,000–5,000 = 70% ₦6,000–10,000 = 30%	₦5,000–10,000 = 45% ₦11,000–15,000 = 35% ₦16,000+ = 20%
Camp income/day	₦10,000–20,000 = 50% ₦21,000–30,000 = 30% ₦31,000+ = 20%	₦20,000–30,000 = 45% ₦31,000–50,000 = 35% ₦50,000+ = 20%
Challenges	Long hours = 40% Fuel cost = 20% Traffic = 20% Others = 20%	Traffic congestion = 60% Fuel scarcity = 20% Security concerns = 20%
Livelihood improved?	Yes = 80% A little = 15% No = 5%	Yes = 90% A little = 7% No = 3%

**Interpretation:** Table 3 demonstrates that transport operators experience large, predictable income multipliers during camp weeks (e.g., CAC camp-week daily income mostly ₦10k–20k; RCCG often ₦20k–50k+), with RCCG operators servicing far more trips and reporting greater absolute earnings; yet both groups face constraints (long hours, fuel costs, and especially traffic congestion at RCCG). This indicates that mobility networks are central to sacred economies: they enable the flow of pilgrims and goods, generate livelihoods, and at the same time produce infrastructural stress that can degrade the quality and sustainability of those same livelihoods

### **Discussion**

The findings from CAC's Babalola Memorial Camp and RCCG's Redemption Camp demonstrate that religious convention camps in Nigeria are not only sacred spaces of worship but also engines of socio-economic transformation. By comparing a historically rooted but modestly scaled camp (CAC) with a mega-Pentecostal camp (RCCG), this study illustrates how religious tourism operates along a spectrum of localised and transnational economic impact.

- i. **Shared Economic Impacts:** Across both camps, vendors, transport operators, and residents reported significant improvements in income and livelihood during camp events. For example, 85% of CAC vendors and 92% of RCCG vendors confirmed gaining new customers beyond the camp week, suggesting that convention activities foster long-term commercial linkages. Similarly, both CAC and RCCG transport operators reported exponential increases in trips and income during camp periods, with over 80% affirming that their livelihoods had improved. We can see here that these findings support earlier studies that painted religious gatherings as seasonal opportunities for informal economic growth in Africa (Oni, 2019; Ukah, 2008). Both camps also presented challenges that mirror each other. Traffic congestion, inflated prices, and sanitation issues were recurrent problems, confirming previous research that religious tourism often produces socio-environmental strain alongside economic opportunities (Adedibu, 2016). Yet, the persistence of attendance growth indicates that participants perceive the spiritual benefits as outweighing these inconveniences in most cases.
- ii. **Differences in Scale and Scope:** The comparison reveals striking differences in scale. At CAC, average visitor spending clustered between ₦11,000–20,000 and ₦21,000+, while at RCCG, more than 80% of respondents reported spending above ₦21,000 at weekly basis. Vendor income during camp week at CAC ranged mostly between ₦21,000–100,000, whereas RCCG vendors reported much higher earnings, often exceeding ₦200,000. This discrepancy reflects RCCG's global network, branding, and the transnational flow of pilgrims (Ukah, 2011), which contrasts with CAC's more localised but deeply historic constituency (Peel, 2016). Transport operators also illustrated the contrast as well: while CAC riders reported camp weekly income of between ₦10,000–30,000, RCCG riders frequently exceeded ₦30,000–50,000 daily. This disparity underscores how megachurch camps like RCCG function as semi-urban economies with dense commercial ecosystems (Adeboye, 2017).
- iii. **Cultural Positioning of Camps:** Another key difference lies in the cultural positioning of both camps. The CAC Babalola Memorial Camp is tied to the legacy of Joseph Ayo Babalola, the prophetic founder of Nigeria's first indigenous Pentecostal movement. Its memorial function sustains a pilgrimage character that attracts a steady but modest flow of participants, often older worshippers and denominationally loyal members. In contrast, the RCCG Redemption Camp embodies a modern Pentecostal megacity,

complete with banks, real estate, universities, and commercial services (Ukah, 2008). It attracts a younger, urban, and transnational demographic, making its economic footprint wider and more diversified.

- iv. **Religious Economy Theory (RET) Lens:** Framing these findings within Religious Economy Theory (RET) sharpens the contrast. RCCG exemplifies “innovation and diversification,” expanding beyond worship into education, housing, and commerce to capture a broad and heterogeneous constituency. Its model reflects RET’s insight that religious organisations thrive by competing in a marketplace of spiritual and social goods. CAC, meanwhile, illustrates “niche positioning” by anchoring itself in historical memory and denominational loyalty. Its pilgrimage-like orientation secures a stable but smaller membership base. Together, the two camps confirm RET’s claim that religious vitality often emerges not from monopolies but from plural strategies of survival, innovation, and adaptation within competitive religious fields.
- v. **Global Relevance of Sacred Economies:** The comparative evidence reveal that sacred spaces are increasingly doubling as economic hubs. The CAC camp demonstrates how even modest, historically rooted sites generate income, support small vendors, and sustain local transport operators. RCCG, on the other hand, illustrates how Pentecostal megachurches transform into global religious economies with regional and international spillover. These findings reinforce global debates on the intersection of religion, economy, and development (Haynes, 2021), showing that Nigerian convention camps are laboratories where spirituality and capitalism intersect. Hence, it is quite impossible to separate religion from economics. For scholars of global religious studies, this comparison becomes relevant because it sketches how African Christianities are shaping new paradigms of religious tourism and economic agency. Whereas Western scholarship often focuses on pilgrimage to ancient sacred sites (e.g., Mecca, Lourdes, Jerusalem), Nigerian convention camps show how new sacred economies are being constructed in postcolonial contexts, often with greater intensity and economic embeddedness (Adogame, 2013).
- vi. **Policy Implications:** Finally, the study offers practical lessons. Local governments stand to benefit from the informal economies generated by camps but must also address the strain on infrastructure. For CAC, policies could focus on road improvements and sanitation facilities to enhance the visitor experience. For RCCG, traffic management and environmental regulation are urgent priorities given the camp’s massive scale. More broadly, these findings suggest that religious convention camps of-course, deserve recognition not just as sites of worship but as informal engines of rural–urban development.

## **Conclusion**

This study has shown that religious convention camps, regardless of size or level of institutionalisation, serve as vital nodes of socio-economic activity in Nigeria. While existing research on mega-camps like RCCG’s Redemption Camp have shown large-scale infrastructural development, the findings from CAC’s Babalola Memorial Camp demonstrate that even smaller, denominational camps generate substantial short-term and residual economic benefits. The likes of vendors, transport operators, and other informal actors experience significant income boosts during camp weeks, while some vendors even report longer-term customer retention. However, these gains are tempered by challenges such as inflated prices, traffic congestion, poor sanitation, and limited accommodation facilities.

Meanwhile, the comparative insight underscores two key realities: first, sacred spaces are not merely religious centres or pilgrim centres but also important engines of informal economic growth; and secondly, the scale and institutional structures of camps shape both the magnitude of benefits and the nature of attendant challenges. This duality goes a long way to show the importance of integrating religious camps into broader economic and infrastructural planning discussions in Nigeria and in Africa as a whole.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made;

- i. There is a need for the government, religious authorities, and local councils to invest jointly in transport systems, waste management, accommodation, and sanitation facilities around campgrounds to reduce congestion and enhance sustainability.
- ii. Guidelines should be established for vendors and transport operators during camp periods to prevent exploitative price hikes while ensuring equitable access to economic opportunities for both local and external participants.
- iii. Policies should encourage participation of marginalized groups (women, small-scale traders, local artisans) to ensure that economic benefits are broadly distributed rather than concentrated among a few.
- iv. There is a need for regular socio-economic impact assessments to be conducted across different types of camps to track benefits and challenges. This will help create tailored interventions for mega-camps versus smaller denominational camps.
- v. Camps should encourage vendors to build business continuity beyond camp weeks through contact exchange, micro-financing, and cooperative systems. This will ensure that temporary economic gains translate into sustainable livelihoods.
- vi. Finally, there is a high need to strengthen partnerships between camp management and local host communities to balance economic benefits with social and environmental responsibilities, ensuring that both visitors and residents enjoy improved living standards.

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