

Public Perceptions on the Impacts of Proliferation of Churches on Corruption in Benue State, Nigeria: an Insight of Makurdi Metropolis of Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract : The proliferation of churches that accompanied by the high level of corruption in Nigeria has attracted a good level of attention. Statistics show that about 72.3 million Nigerian are Christians. Going by this figure, the church indeed wields enormous potential in its followers and in turn stems corruption across the nation. The tenacious preference of corruption, however, suggests that it has not played its responsibility in this regard effectively. In other to investigate this fact; the oral interview and questionnaire were used. A sample size of 400 respondents was drawn from Makurdi town following the Yamane's formula. The analysis of the data revealed that the proliferation of churches in Benue state, has, seemingly, not translated to a drastic reduction of corruption. Additionally, despite the proliferation of churches in Makurdi metropolis, corruption and other deviant behaviour were relatively high. Based on these findings, it was recommended among others that corruption in the churches should be checked and those leaders involved in corrupt activities should be prosecuted accordingly. Church leaders should not focus their preaching on prosperity but on hard work and corrupt-free society.

Keywords: Corruption, Proliferation of churches, Makurdi metropolis.

I. INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of churches in Nigeria recently is one issue that has attracted reasonable attention. A stroll down the average Nigeria Street will reveal the widespread presence of churches (Efe, 2012; Morgan, 2015). And with thousands of registered churches within its domain; this is also applicable in Makurdi the capital of Benue State.

It is pertinent to ask what factors account for the proliferation of churches in Nigeria. In reaction to this question, Ajiki (2008), Efe (2012), Olukayode (2013), observed that the proliferation of churches in Nigeria is to a certain extent the result of schisms and break-away. This was significantly fuelled by Martin Luther's revolution that laid the foundation for the proliferation of churches. Many scholars (Efe, 2012; Morgan 2015; Ajiki, 2008; Olukayode 2013) attributed the

proliferation of churches in Nigeria to poverty and the rise of materialism in our society. Consequently, little regard is paid to the means of attainment as material wealth has become an end in itself. As such, many poor and average Nigerians are surrounded by signs and symbols of wealth.

These churches, which have risen against the backdrop of moral and socio-economic deterioration in Nigeria society, play a rather significant role in the lives of everyday Nigerians. Efe (2012) observes that from the top echelons of the society to the lower rungs of the ladder, Nigeria is reputed to be a very religious bunch, placing divine in human affairs. Since the first imprints of Christianity on Nigeria soil in the 17th century, the faith has grown in leap and bounds, with churches springing up by the hour. This phenomenon has had varies effects on Nigeria and Nigerians. Historically, the socio-economic contribution of the churches since inception and spread is evident in the spread in the provision of education, Health care facilities and services, not to mention the social and moral restraint it has play on million of its followers across the nation (Efe, 2012; Nwaomah, 2007).

The perceived corruption among churches reminds us of the German philosopher Karl Mark who once said 'Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people'. And this has proven to be the truth over the years as early Christian missionaries would come from their own countries sacrificing all because of the people, then nearly everything they give is free, they provide free clothes, food and even education, but this is not so among the current league of Nigeria missionaries as they usually force their ever willing congregation to pay excessively for what ordinarily the early missionaries would have given free (Efe, 2012; Onongha, 2007).

The proliferation of churches would rather enhance development in every sphere of national life. But curiously,

this has not been the case in modern times; the more has not been the merrier (Onongha 2007) The proliferation of churches in Nigeria has not been attended by a corresponding effect in proper behaviour and consequently in socio-economic and even political development (Efe, 2012; Onongha 2007; Olukayode, 2013; Ajiki, 2008). Consequently, this has been the reason for the high level of corruption and anti-social activities in our country today. Corruption is a product of greed, an act which deviates from the formal rules of the conduct governing the actions of someone in a position of public authority because of private motive such as wealth, power or status (Ackerman, 1999, Khan, 1996). The Nigeria state is presently experiencing a pandemic of corrupt practices in both the public and private sectors. Many cases of corruption by political offices holders, church leaders have been reported without effective prosecution. Corruption has become the culture of many Nigeria from the lower to the upper strata of the society (Olukayode, 2013). The Transparency international 2011 corruption perception index (CPI) measures the perceived levels of corruption in the public sector in 183 countries and territories around the world. According to the survey, Nigeria ranks as one of the most corrupt countries of the world.

Objectively, Nigeria society is well known of the Christianity all over the world (Ajiki, 2008) therefore we are tempted to ask; does the proliferation of churches portend ill for Christianity in Nigeria and the Nigerian society at large? This question has been a source of lively debate among scholars. In view of this a Nigerian-born pastor in Ukraine pastor Sunday Adelaja, (2005) blamed Nigerian churches and religious leaders for the widespread corruption which has crippled the economy. In another reaction, Rev. Ndukwe (as cited in Efe 2012) asserts that; the proliferation of churches may not be regarded as evil in itself, but the motive (reason) and consequences of it will determine the rightness or wrongness of a particular case of proliferation. The proliferation of churches that accompanies with the rising wave of corruption and other criminal activities make scholars to question the credibility, while others were of the view that if not because of the proliferation of churches in the contemporary Nigeria country, corruption would have been worst. It is to this fact that this paper seeks to lay its emphasis to find out the respondents views on this topic.

Research Objectives

The study was stimulated to look at;

- i. The factors responsible for the proliferation of churches in Makurdi metropolis.
- ii. To assess the impacts of proliferation of churches on corruption.
- iii. To examine the relationship between proliferation of churches and corruption in Nigeria.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Factors responsible for the proliferation of churches in Nigerian

There are so many causes attributed to the proliferation of churches In Nigeria. This paper will examine few out of many, these include;

High Poverty Rate and Growing Desperation:

More than 50% of Nigerians live below the poverty level. This is so as oil became the mainstay of the economy in the 1970s, agriculture, which hitherto accounted for over 70% of the nation's revenue base, was regulated to the background (Onongha, 2007). As it was observed by Umachi (2007), Keeper (2012) Oil did not demand any hard work from the government or its citizens. It only needed to be explored and exported. This new reality facilitated corruption to alarming extents, with the military and its centralized government at the helm of affairs. Nigerians abandoned their farms and scrambled for contracts. According to Koppelman (2009), the government got drunk on the windfall and abdicated its responsibility to the people. A critical mass of Nigerians was left on the fringes and the gap between the rich and the poor widened greatly (Efe, 2013). According to him, this situation has created a huge chunk of desperate Nigerians, eager to get out of poverty by any means available. For this class of Nigerians, the capacity to escape poverty seems beyond their reach, compelling them to turn toward the super nature as a means to extricate themselves from the grips of poverty. Richard Cimino as cited in Efe (2013) made a very fine observation in this regard in his article, Nigeria: Pentecostal Boom-Healing or Reflecting a failed State, he says, "the poverty and related high rate of corruption and violence in the country only propelled Pentecostalism into a more prominent place in the Nigerian society". It should be noted that Pentecostalism is strongly associated with the proliferation of churches. Whilst some of these churches indeed provide succour for many Nigerian, a good number of them are religious highway men ambushing vulnerable Nigerians.

Materialism:

The emphasis on material thing has placed high value in Nigeria. According to Oshodi (2014), the worrying decline of living standards from the 1970s coincided with the rise of materialism, a global phenomenon that has, in no small way, been accentuated by the media. Success nowadays is measure by one's ability to acquire material possession such as houses and cars. A man is measured and regarded base on the material things he acquired. Similarly, Mendels (2006) argues that in Nigeria little regard is paid to the means of attainment as material wealth has become end in itself. Many poor and average Nigerians are surrounded by signs and symbols of wealth. The media brings it to their homes every day; movie stars, flamboyant politicians and big businessmen, all marked by glitz and glamour, modern-day emblems of success. Even

commercial entities have latched onto the material craze, coaxing consumers to participate in one promo or reality show, promising instant millions. But commercial entities are not alone in this regard. Equally complicit, are fast religious bodies, churches promising instant prosperity and success (Efe, 2013). Similarly, Simbine (2013) alluded that most sermons, preached in churches across the nation, are focused on success and prosperity, with material goods as the ultimate expression of success. A good number of churches have sprung, and are indeed springing in this regard. They understand the current crave for material satisfaction and capitalize on it to build churches that are no less commercial organizations. Ahmed (in Efe, 2013), in his Open Letter to the Church, observes as follows, “the teaching regarding prosperity has been asymmetric. There now appears to be a view that there is a strong correlation between godliness and wealth. Backing this fact, therefore, I have attended church services in many churches in Makurdi Metropolis especially Living Faith Church, Dunamis, Redeem Church of God, Mountain of fire to mention a few where the preachers teach that poverty is a sin, moreover, in some services, people who make higher contributions towards the church publicly acknowledge (Participant observation 2015).

Impacts of the proliferation of churches in Nigeria

The proliferation of churches in Nigeria has not been without its pros and cons. It is neither absolutely good nor evil. A cursory examination of the Nigerian situation; widespread poverty, high crime rate; corruption; despair and desperation vis-à-vis the proliferation of churches might suggest that the ubiquitous presence of churches has been of no concrete value. It might be argued that the proliferation of churches has contributed to the degeneration of human character and conditions of living in Nigeria. But this might not be the case (Efe 2013). An analysis of the proliferation of churches in Nigeria will throw up the following effects:

i. Contributions to the peace and stability:

The impacts of the proliferation of churches in Nigeria might not be properly ascertained except we consider the ‘opportunity cost’ of not having many churches (Ajiki, 2008). In an age where human wickedness is attaining frightening dimensions and large numbers of Nigerians are eager to do whatever it takes to succeed, the imagination might be able to capture the alternative scenario to the proliferation of churches – utter chaos. In a newspaper interview, Apostle Hanford as cited in Clement (2013), a pastor and former Director-General of the Nigerian Stock Market, speaking against the backdrop of complaints about the proliferation of churches, concluded thus, “I want Nigerians to imagine what would have happened if the churches did not exist, the crime rate would be worse than what is currently being experienced.1” The proliferation of churches has, in its own unique way, served as a positive restraint to human excesses in the Nigerian society. While we do agree that corruption and crime are widespread, we must also agree that it could have been worse in the absence of the

church. “Well, whether you have one church or you have one million churches, the question of sin is completely different. You are having many churches sin would reduce, sin comes from the heart, but let us thank God that we are having many churches, perhaps if we don’t have these churches, we would not know where we would be today.” (Efe, 2013)

ii. Preaching of fake Teachings and Gospel

The questionable and fake doctrines and practices are also disturbing consequences of the proliferation of churches (Umachi 2007). Many scholars like Simbine (2011), Oshodi(2012), Efe (2013) argued that Church establishment as an all-comers affair has invited charlatans of all shades. The quest to increase membership has resulted in the employment of gimmicks and tricks in a bid to attract and retain members. Pastors and church leaders increasingly tailor their messages to suit the yearnings aspiration of the people. The consumer’s culture of the larger world, where products and services are fashioned to meet the ever-changing tastes and admiration of the people, is becoming the mainstay of the church (Efe, 2013). Vox Populi, Vox Dei, the voice of the people is slowly becoming the voice of God. Cases of Syncretism today abound as many more church leaders try to incorporate African traditional methods into the message and practice of the gospel. With most of the available churches unaccountable to anyone and most of them untrained and unschooled, susceptibility to false teachings is on the increase (Ajiki, 2008), Efe (2013).

The proliferation of Churches, as demonstrated above has had its negative and positive effects on society. Considering the current activities, it is showing that the Church has played important roles in education across the world, as well as in commerce. It has and still serves as one of society’s most vivid moral compass. In this vein, the more churches the society has, the better off it should be and can be. But unfortunately, the proliferation of churches set aside the good, the bad and the ugly surface, the chaff and the wheat. Improving the positive effects of the proliferation of churches in Nigeria and particularly in reducing endemic corruption will be dependent on the ability of the Church to cleanse itself from the very vices that plague the larger society. Judgment must indeed begin in the house of God (Clement, 2003; Abioje, 2011, Efe, 2013).

Corruption in Churches and its consequences

Considering the Biblical approaches to corruption, the Bible asserts.

“The chief priest pick up the coin and said it is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money” (Math:27:6)

The above illustrates the story of the transactions between Judas Iscariot and the Jewish priesthood in the Bible. When Judas brought back the proceeds he received for betraying Jesus to the chief priest, they rejected the money believing it is unclean. In the Nigerian case, the spread of churches to

every nook and a cranny of Nigeria, corruption are at all time high in the country (Olukeyode, 2013; Ogunbum, 2012). Christian pastors and Evangelists are using every available media such as newspaper internet, mobile phone to spread the gospel, of prosperity and materialism. Considering this trend, Kukah (2007) observed that these pastors are scavenging for fortunes in the name of leading souls to God through the organisation of endless spiritual trade fairs called revival aimed at indoctrinating and socialising ordinary citizens away from the culture of hard work and the need to develop a truly Christian ethnic norms to wealth (kukah,2007)

It is interesting to note that a good number of the cases of corruption have been resulted in the churches, not from the orthodox churches (so called), with their rigid hierarchies and accountability systems, but rather from unorthodox churches, most of them of Pentecostal leaning(Efe, 2013). This should not be misconstrued to mean that the orthodox denominations are altogether devoid of corruption, but on-the-ground facts do prove that corruption in Nigerian churches is more prominent, a feature, with the numerous new generation churches springing up consistently (Efe 2013). This presupposes that a relationship does exist between the proliferation of churches in Nigeria and the rising cases of corruption in Nigerian churches (Efe, 2013; Olukeyode, 2013). The proliferation of churches in Nigeria has been accelerated by individuals who have seized the demand for spiritual solutions to poverty and distress, by a critical mass of Nigerian, to advance their personal greed. A good number of these pastors have no credible call for God to the ministry and most of them have resorted to questionable means to seemingly satisfy the needs of their followers (Efe 2013; Olukeyode, 2013)..

Another relationship worth mentioning between the proliferation of churches in Nigeria and corruption in Nigerian churches is that it has eroded the credibility of the churches have become commonplace, meeting places, spiritual houses where desperate people go, mainly to solve their problems, without minding their relationship with God (Gbenda, 2010; Nwaomah 2007; Olukeyode, 2013). The proliferation of churches in Nigeria has gradually lent the church to the mundane enabling fraudulent characters to venture into the ministry for pecuniary purpose without any qualms (Efe, 2013).

Corruption indoctrination symbolised by the ‘get rich quick’ sermon in some Nigerian churches are posturing Christian into corrupt practices. Today, churches now judge the commitment of their members by equating their contribution to project at par with their employment status or business standing (Gbenda, 2010). This approach is pushing many church members to commit financial crimes in order to meet their church expectations. To a case in view is that of the Bank-PHD ex-boss, Atuche who paid the sum of N45million to a church as Tithes from stolen money. The money was paid to two Catholic Church branches in delta state through a bank transfer from bank PHD mortgage Limited accounts (Ogunbum, 2012). The issue of the first fruit as an obligation

to worshipers according to Ogunbum,(2012), Olukeyode (2013); Morgan (2015) appeared in 64verses of the Bible. Some of the verses are presented below.

Honour the Lord with your wealth and with the first-fruits of all your produce: then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine (proverb 3:9-10).

Honour the Lord with your wealth and with the first – fruits of all your produce (proverb 3:9)

It is worthy to point out that in the twenty first century; an empirical interpretation of the above verses seems to define the first-fruit as a marginal increment such as, the first salary increment or the first turnover in a business transaction (Efe, 2013). However, according to Umachi (2007), Oshodi (2012), Olukeyode (2013), argued that the interpretation of the ‘first fruit’ in some churches refers to the January salary of every church member. Thus, according to them, a church member who submitted his monthly salary to the church in the name of first-fruit’ may likely engage in financial crimes in order to survive.

Another recent trend worth mentioning and most disturbing in Nigerian churches, is ‘seed offering’, this is a fund raising service conducted by some churches Shishima (2012). The ‘seed offering’ session involves challenging church members to donate a huge amount of money to the church with a promise that they will receive the money back in folds through a spiritual magic (participant observation in many churches in Makurdi town). This ‘empty your pocket evangelism’ according to Shishima (2012), and Olukeyode (2013) is characterised by the twisting of biblical stand and in order to swindle un-suspecting over-zealous believers.

Some cases of corruptions in Nigerian churches as reported by Nigeria daily Newspapers headlines

Instance 1; Pastor bags four years imprisonment for fraud (23next newspapers, January5, 2010)

Instance 2; Pastor Dupes, bank MD, Others detained for N2bn fraud (Nigerian Compass, 15th, March 2010)

Instance 3; N10m fraud-Lagos court orders arrest of prophet (daily Champion, Jan.2010)

Instance 4; Holy Spirit removed her pants-says pastor accused of having sex with student inside the church (Nigerian Tribune, 7th May 2010)

Instance 5; Formal Governor of Benue State was accused of corruption (Shihara reporter, 30th Oct, 2019).

It is pertinent to state that corruption in the context of this paper is not limited to fiscal fraud but that it also encompasses moral laxity and poor character. Nevertheless, fiscal deceit is a major component of corruption, not only in the church but in the Nigerian society at large as, there is an adage that “the love of money is the root of all evil. “This, as earlier stated, many fake pastors have risen to set up churches which are nothing less than money making ventures. The reasons might

be that such a man is innately depraved, and because he perceives the church to be a lucrative venture (Anachi, 2007, Keeper, 2012, Abioje, 2011). Similarly, Ayandele (2000); Olukayode, (2013) also argued that church leaders now rub their congregations by manipulating the gospel for their personal gains. They have drifted from evangelism of salvation to that of prosperity, even if it entails rubbing. There is reported hype on pastors collecting laundered funds as tithe and offering without recourse to the source.

It is worth to mention therefore that the affluent lifestyles of numerous Nigerian clergy men have made church pioneering efforts attractive for all the wrong reasons. All the trappings of wealth, big and flashy cars, opulent houses, designed clothing, and attendant sycophants, in today's materialistic world, are the hallmarks of today's "successful" preacher. Agreeing with this tactics Efe (2013) and Omoregbe (2014) argued that these preachers are held in awe by their followers who are often willing to do anything to please "Daddy" or "Mummy" as they are often refers. For indeed the Bible does say, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls as those who must give account" (Heb 13:17). And neither do the scriptures indicate that a man of God must live in poverty or averagely because he is so called. But we must also agree that most of the displays of wealth by today's men of God have bordered on the extreme. This fact has in an insidious manner given rise to corruption in Nigerian churches. Pastors, with a genuine call of God on their lives have, in a bid to attain to "success in ministry" as defined by sheer opulence, given in to temptations and yielded to corrupt practices. Others, not all called, but desperate for wealth an attracted by the display of the same, by men of God, have ventured into the ministry, perpetrating the proliferation of churches in Nigeria (Efe, 2013, Umaxhi, 2007, Oshodi, 2012).

The Biblical views on Corruption

The Bible has stated in clear terms against individual involvement in corruption. For instance, the bible said, "Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe makes people blind to what is right and ruins the causes of those who are innocent" (Ex 23: 8). This charge reaches as far back as the gathering in the wilderness and is enshrined in the Law given to preserving ethical conduct amongst the Israelite nation. This law recognizes the importance of unbiased jurisdiction in every legal system and is aptly directed at judges.

The Bible emphasizes truth, justice and protection of the poor as fundamental goals for fighting corruption, "but for just a bribe you let the guilty go free and you prevent and deprive the innocent of getting justice" (Isaiah 5:23); "do not follow the majority when they do wrong or when they give evidence that pervert justice; and do not show partiality to a poor person at his trial" (Ex. 23:2-3).

Biblical prophets are explicit on the effects of corruption; corruption destroys, "some of your people murder for pay. Some charge interest on the loans they make to the follow-

Israelite and get rich by taking advantage of them." (Ezekiel 22:12)

Psalm 15:1 and 5 says: "Lord, who may enter your temple? Those who make loans without charging interest and cannot be bribed to testify against the innocent" The prophet and the psalm mention in the same verse corruption and usury! The effect is the same: exploitation, reduction of life expectancy and violation of just distribution. Wealth must be rooted in a good performance and not based on exploitation, therefore "it is better to have a little, honestly earned than to have a large income gained dishonestly" (Proverbs 16:8).

Corruption destroys communities. Corrupt judges accept secrete bribes and then justice is not done" (Prov 17:23). The New Testament shows how corruption led to the betrayal and subsequent killing of Jesus (Mk 14:10). And how, driven by the guilt resulting from corruption, Judas proceeded to hang himself, (Matt 27: 5). The New Testament also shows how the High priests and elders had also paid bribes to the soldiers so that they spread the lie that the body of Christ was not resurrected but stolen (Efe, 2013, Wegh (2010). In Acts 8:8-24, Peter strongly rebukes Simon the magician who attempts to buy the power of God so that anyone he places his hand on would receive the Holy Spirit. This scripture shows the proclivity of men towards possessing the power of God through irregular, corrupt avenues but the true power of God cannot be acquired by underhanded means (Efe, 2013). In Luke 19:1-10 a corrupt public officer, Zacchaeus comes in contact with Jesus and makes a most profound about-face and pledged restitution.

Deducing from the above, it is evidence that the Bible does not at any point justify and accept corruption. The church in Nigeria, surrounded by corruption, must do likewise. The account of Zacchaeus shows the level of conviction that must attend corrupt officials, at all levels, when they come in contact with the church (Efe, 2013).

III. METHODOLOGY

The method of research used to gather information was through oral interview and questionnaire. The selected number of people, especially knowledgeable people who are in a better position to give a vivid, accurate and authentic information on the impact of the proliferation of churches on corruption in Nigerian insight of Makurdi metropolis of Benue State were interviewed. Apart from conducting the interview, relevant data were gathered from distributing a structural questionnaire to respondents. The sample size of the study was 400 respondents drawn from Yamen's formula of sample size determination. In addition, the convenient sampling which refers to a non-probability sampling method involving the selection of individual on the basis of their availability and willingness to respond was used to reach the respondents. The strength of this method is that the result is objective since respondents made themselves available out of their own volition. Therefore, the outcome of the research

cannot be specious. Data generated from the field is analysed using simple percentage analytical technique.

IV. RESULT

Table 1: Responses on the factors Responsible for the proliferation of churches in Mkd

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Leadership tussle	65	16.2
High poverty rate and growing desperation	107	26.8
Materialism/ get money quick syndrome	152	38.0
Spread of Gospel	76	19.0
Total	400	

Source: Field survey, 2019

Data presented above sought to find out respondent s knowledge on the factors responsible for the proliferation of churches in Makurdi Metropolis. The raw data shows that 152 (38.0%) identified Materialism and get money quick syndrome as the factors responsible for the proliferation of churches in Makurdi metropolis, 107(26.8%) identified high poverty rate and growing desperation. 65 (16.2%) of the respondents identified leadership tussle while 76(19.0%) identified spread of gospel as the factors responsible for the proliferation of churches in Makurdi metropolis. Apart from these sources, some respondents during interview attributed other factor responsible for the proliferation of churches in Makurdi as the closeness of the end time as stated in the book of 1John 4:1.

One of the church members in an interview in Walomayo ward of Makurdi town said that:

“ get money quick syndrome is the reason why some newly ordained pastors cut away from their mother church to establish their churches so as to get quick money from members”.

Another respondent said in pirgin that:

“for me I think sey na to get plenty money that mek some pastors wan open their church”. This can be translating that it is the zeal to get more money that motivated some pastors to establish their churches.

A pastor one of the founders of a church in an interview pointed out that:

“I established my church because it was a divine call”.

Another pastor in Logo2 in Makurdi town pointed out that:

“God call him to help people because the devil is destroying his people, so he has to answer God’s call”. Another pastors in Wadata in Makurdi said *“my senior pastor maltreated and suffered me, so I have to cut away from him and set up my own church to propagate the good news of the lord”.*

A respondent in Wurukum area of Makurdi metropolis voiced out that:

“the increasing numbers of churches in Makurdi is because of the zeal to come out of poverty that is common in the state. One of the traditional ruler of Fiidi ward of Makurdi town lamented that “ we are in the generation where our young men want to get money by all means and therefore they are using churches in trading using God Name”.

Another traditional ruler in North Bank area of Makurdi metropolis also lamented that:

people are using the name of God in trading because our people are desperate and that make some pastors deceive them using the name of God through bible.”

Another traditional head of Walomayo also stated that:

Leadership tussle in our churches is another cause of rising number of churches in Makurdi metropolis.”

A lecturer with the Benue State University, Makurdi in an interview pointed out that:

“The high level of poverty and lack of contentment as well as greediness among youth is one of the reasons why many of them want to operate their churches and as such they consider the establishment of churches as the best option.

Another lecturer in department of Sociology, Benue State University Makurdi observed that:

The long period of military administration in Nigeria ushered in unemployment in Nigeria and this, in turn, brought about poverty and untold hardship and misery on both old and young. Unemployment with its attended evils has affected Nigerian society. It has contributed to too many people becoming perpetual armed robbers and kidnappers, drug addict and other anti-social vices. Today everyone wants to be a pastor in order to make fast money instead of serving humanity. Unemployment in Nigeria has become the bane of society. It is, therefore, one of the causes of the proliferation of churches in Nigeria.

A stakeholder in Wurukum, Makurdi metropolis in an interview said that:

“Some churches were established because the founders saw it an avenue of earning regular income in the face of hardship and unemployment. They regard the church as an industry that brings huge money, consequently, they continue to establish more churches because the more the churches, the more money they maximize”. Another pastor in one of the churches in Makurdi metropolis pointed out that “Christian clergymen hold the belief that the best way to bring the word of God closer to the people is to open more churches. That is why every time a man of God receives a revelation, and subsequently set up his/ her church”.

Chairman of CAN Benue Chapter in an interview lamented that:

Graduating from a Bible College does not mean you are automatically called into ministry. And that you are even

called into ministry does not mean you should set up a church immediately. Being called into ministry and being led by the Spirit of God to start a church are two different things. I daresay that most of the ministers in Nigeria are actually not called. Greed and inordinate ambition to acquire wealth overnight called them into the ministry; hence we have this tragedy on our hands today. It is not hyperbolic to say that the body of Christ as we have in the country today is not what the Lord Jesus Christ died for.

Impacts of Proliferation of Churches on Corruption in Makurdi Town

Table 2: Responses on whether the proliferation of churches help in curbing corruption or not.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	108	27.0
No	242	60.5
I don't know	50	12.5
Total	400	100

Source: field survey; 2019

The above table indicates that 242 (60.5%) of the respondents do attest that the proliferation of churches in Makurdi town does not help in curbing corruption in the state. 108 (27.0%) of the respondents opined that proliferation of churches help in curbing corruption in the state while 50 (12.5%) did not response to the question.

To compliment the above information, one of the respondents in an interview voice out:

“That numerous churches that have opened recently are guilty of money laundering, fraud, swindling and embezzlement. The more churches open, the harder it is for authorities to control all of them. Therefore, some people use new churches as fronts for their nefarious operations”.

Another respondent said:

“if churches were run with the fear of God, there is absolutely nothing wrong with it. If we have churches in all the nooks and crannies of Nigeria preaching holiness and preparing the citizenry for the coming of their Maker, the country will, no doubt, rank among the greatest countries in the world but preaching prosperity dominate”.

Another respondent answered that:

“in the face of many churches in makurdi metropolis, corruption and other anti social behaviour continue growing in the town”.

In addition, another respondent answered in Tiv language that:

“shien u Mbaadua ve see nger ne yo asorabo ato kposukposu hembra ngeen” nahan sha mhem wan yo mbaadua mba hegen ne ve wase bee ga. This literally means, now that there are many churches, anti social activities increase significantly and

therefore proliferation of churches have little impact. Another respondent said that even members of churches, church leaders, clergies involve in corrupt activities like cheating, deceiving others, fraudulence activities among others.

Table 3: Responses on the major theme of preaching in churches in Makurdi town

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Prosperity	196	49.0
Hard work	63	17.8
Fight against corruption	57	14.3
Love for one another	84	21.00
TOTAL	400	100

Source: Field survey, 2019

As the backup of table of the above, the respondents were asked to provide answer on what always form the focal point of preaching in the churches in Makurdi. The table indicates that 196 (49.0 %) of the respondents identified prosperity as the major theme preached in the churches. 57 (14.3%) identified fight against corruption while 63 (17.8%) identified hardwork as the focal point in the preaching in the churches in Makurdi.

Respondents during an interview said that:

“Many churches preach prosperity. This is because they view poverty as the devils work sidelining hard work as a best way of improving livelihood”.

Cases of Corruption in Churches in Makurdi Metropolis:

Table: 4 Responses on the involvement of Christians in corruption in Makurdi town

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	263	75.6
No	106	18.8
No response	31	5.6
Total	400	1000

Source: Field survey 2019.

As another back up of table 3 above on the church leaders involvement on corruption indicates that 263 (75.6%) of the respondents agreed that church leaders involves in corrupt practices of different sorts, while 106 (18.8%) respondents were of the view that their church leaders were not involved in corrupt practice as from the time of this research. 31 (5.6%) provide no response.

A respondent in an interview said that:

Even church leaders, clergies are accusing of corrupt activities in the church.

V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Objective One: The finding of the study indicates that materialism and the zeal to get rich quick is the cause of the proliferation of churches in Makurdi metropolis. In addition high poverty rate and the growing desperation among youth are the causes of the proliferation of churches in Makurdi metropolis. 38% and 26.8% respectively attest to this finding. This finding fillies with Efe 2013, Olukayode (2013), Clement (2015), Oshodi (2012) to mention just the few. They argued that success in this new era is measured by one's ability to acquire material possession, as such many people sees church establishment as quick way of been rich.

Objective Two: The findings also reveal that the proliferation of churches in Makurdi metropolis has little impacts in curbing corruption in the town. This was because 48.0 % of the respondents attest to this fact. This finding also agreed with (Efe 2013) Ogumbumi (2012) Umachi (2009) They argue that a cursory examination of the Nigeria situation, poverty, high crime rate, corruption, despair and desperation Vis-à-vis the proliferation of churches might suggest that Ubiquitous presence of churches has been of no concrete value. In addition to above, the findings reveal that churches leaders particularly preach prosperity and Material acquisition. Oluka Yode (2013) observed that Nigeria churches have drifted from evangelism of salvation to that of prosperity, even if it entails robbing.

Objective 3: Findings of this study revealed that there are so many reported cases of corruption in modern churches especially among Christian and their leaders. This finding tallies with Olukayode (2013) and Simbine (2011) who observed that most church leaders manipulates the gospel to suit their personal gains.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper analysed the public perception on the impacts of the proliferation of church and corruption in Nigerian Society with particular reference of Makurdi metropolis. It was discovered that Materialism or the zeal to get rich quick are main reason for the proliferation of churches in Nigeria. Many churches in Nigeria now operate as a conduit for money laundry and the groundswell for corruption. Despite the abundant natural and human ravage families and the poor beans the burden of having to pay bribes as a condition of accessing essential services such as education, water, health and electricity.

In Nigeria, widespread corruption undermines economic growth, national security and the eco-system, on which we and future generation depend. The misallocation of resources due to corruption is responsible for the majority of the unemployed youth and high level of insecurity in our clear country. In the face of failed state, the majority of Nigerians seek succour in t he establishment of churches. However, in the quest for economic and political benefit, churches seize the opportunity to manipulate their teaming congregations

through fraudulent and fake doctrines. The unethical indoctrinations that comes from church leaders creates symbols of responsibility and a mindset of objection to do more dishonesty and mistrust. In addition, the trajectories of the churches expansion Vis-à-vis corruption in the country are complementary.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Arising from the findings, the study recommends as follows:

1. The anti-corruption agencies and the legislative must initiate laws that will address corruption in the churches.
2. Church leaders should be made accountable for the funds received and the doctrines propagated by their churches.
3. Church leaders should be arrested if found guilty of corruption. Judgment must start in the house of the lord.
4. Church leaders should be preaching hard work in place of prosperity because success comes through hard work.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Author Iorkosu, T.S wrote both the Protocol and the first draft of the manuscript, while author Emmanuel V.O designed the study and managed the literature searches. Author Donald, T.E wrote the second draft of the manuscript. Author Benedict, T.I and Iyowuese S.I collected the data from the respondents. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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