

Secessionist Movement in Church History: A Critical Analysis of the Protestant Churches' Separation from the Anglican Communion in Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

The secessionist movement, particularly evident in the Protestant Churches' separation from the Anglican Communion, was a critical period in the history and development of Christianity in Nigeria. The schism within the Anglican Church led to the proliferation of churches and the expansion of denominations in Nigeria. Thus, this paper critically delves into the historical, social, and theological factors that engendered the separation of 'Protestant Churches' from the Anglican Church in Nigeria, while assessing its theological and ecclesiastical implications, the objective being to provide a comprehensive account of the underlying motivations behind the breakaway, and its consequences on Nigeria's multi-faceted religious landscape. With the aid of content analysis method of research, which relies essentially on the collection and analysis of secondary data, the study finds out that a complex interplay of colonialism, cultural dynamics, and doctrinal differences contributed to the emergence of distinct Protestant denominations in Nigeria during the colonial period. Furthermore, the paper contends that the role of the secessionist movement in shaping and reshaping religious identities, practices, interactions and discourses within the country cannot be over-emphasized, thus, deserving the critical attention of the intellectual community.

Key Word: Secessionist Movement, Church History, Protestant Churches, Anglican Communion.

INTRODUCTION

The year 1517 marked a critical period in Church history. The unity which the universal church, Roman Catholic, enjoyed was shattered by the protestant Reformation, championed by Martin Luther. Thus, the Anglican Church is indisputably a Protestant church, whose rich and complex history reflects its deep-seated Catholic heritage and its distinct Protestant theological commitments. The point being made is that the development of the Anglican Church during the Reformation era, and its ongoing engagement with Protestant theology and practices, firmly entrench it within the broader spectrum of Protestantism. Also known as the Church of England, the Anglican Church developed into a distinct entity during the 16th century under King Henry VIII, who broke away from the Roman Catholic Church.^[1] This break in Catholic Christian tradition was primarily motivated by personal and political reasons, rather than theology. Be that as it may, it engendered a series of events that culminated in the establishment of a new church that was Catholic in its liturgy and traditions but Protestant in theology and governance.^[2]

The reign of Elizabeth I (1533-1603) was one of the defining moments in the history of the Anglican Church. During her rule, the Protestant identity of the Church of England was consolidated through the

establishment of the famous Thirty-Nine Articles, a document which outlined the Church's doctrine on major theological issues.[3] The articles also affirmed the key components of Protestant beliefs, such as the authority of scripture (biblical inerrancy), justification by faith alone and rejected certain Roman Catholic doctrines, which it considered unbiblical.[4] It is important to note that the Anglican Church has been greatly influenced by divergent schools of thought within the Protestant circles, some of which include the Puritan movement and the Oxford movement.[5] Consequently, there have been ongoing debates and tensions within the Church regarding its precise doctrinal and theological identity. What remains unequivocal is the fact that it remains firmly established within the broader Protestant tradition, given its strict adherence to the key principles of the Reformation principles such as sola scriptura (scripture alone) and justification by faith.

The Anglican Communion in Nigeria also suffered protest movements within the colonial period (1900-1960). The protest movements are popularly referred to as secessionist (breakaway) movements within European missionary churches. These new churches were tremendously different from the Protestant Anglican Church in matters of doctrines and theology and may be aptly described as distinct branches of the Protestant movement in Nigeria's church history. Therefore, the 'Protestant churches' separation from the Anglican Communion in Nigeria was a significant event in the country's religious history. The secessionist movement, which began in the late 20th century, was driven by various factors, including theological differences, social factors, and historical context.

The schism within the Anglican Church and its attendant consequences on the unity of the Nigerian church have received little or no attention in the intellectual community. The reason being that only a few are aware of the fact that the modern Pentecostal movements in Nigeria owe a lot to the breakaway of Africans from the Anglican community. Against this background, this paper seeks to fill the remarkable lacuna in scholarly discourses on the origin of modern Protestant churches in Nigeria (Pentecostalism). The analysis, thus, aims to provide a critical examination of the secessionist movement within the Anglican Church, with a particular focus on its causes and consequences in Nigeria.

BACKGROUND TO AFRICAN MISSIONS IN NIGERIA

A thorough grasp of the secessionist movements within the Protestant Anglican Church in Nigeria may be impossible without an analysis of the origin of the Christian faith in the country. The present reality of the Christian faith in Nigeria can be better understood only in the light of its past. On this backdrop, it is eminently important to note that Christianity is not indigenous to Nigeria. Rather, it is the result of complex historical developments in Europe, the Americas and the West African sub-region since the 16th century.

In earnest, the origin of the Anglican Church in Nigeria is traceable to evangelical movements in Europe and the United States of America (U.S.A.) toward the suppression and abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.[6] These evangelicals were convinced that preaching in West Africa side by side the illicit trade in humans was practically impossible. It is, however, important to note that these abolitionists were not just driven by religious motives. In fact, at the heart of their objectives was trade and commerce, because majority of them were traders, who strongly believed that evangelism in West Africa would afford them ample opportunity to expand the scope of and profits of their businesses.[7] Prominent amongst these evangelical abolitionists were Granville Sharp and Rev. Thomas Clarkson, who established the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1787.[8] Their push was fruitful, as it gained the support of a British parliamentarian, in the person of William Wilberforce, who consistently and passionately spoke against the cruelties of the illegitimate trade. It is worth noting that the evangelical abolitionist efforts were in addition to an earlier opposition mounted against the slave trade by the famous Society of Friends (the American Quakers).[9]

By the turn of the 19th century, several individuals and groups in Western Europe and in the U.S.A. had already come to terms with the fact that the slave trade needed to be abolished. Consequently, several governments passed laws which prohibited slave trading and slavery in the opening decade of the 19th century. For instance, in 1804, the Danish government formally abandoned the trade. The British parliament enacted legislation against the trade in 1807; the U.S.A followed suit in 1808.[\[10\]](#) Nevertheless, Portugal and Spain continued the illicit trade, prompting Britain to deploy its naval squadron to patrol international waters and compel compliance from these countries. One of the direct consequences of the abolition of the slave trade in Britain and in the U.S.A. was the establishment of Liberia and Sierra Leone as settlements for former slaves after the American war of independence ended on September 3, 1783. While Liberia was established as a settlement for freed slaves from the United States by the American colonization society in 1822, the settlement of Sierra Leone was founded in 1791.[\[11\]](#) Equally important to note is that the creation of these settlements were necessitated by the Industrial Revolution, which created the need for a regular supply of raw materials by the freed slaves. This was in a period when the rapid penetration of the African continent by Europeans opened it up for commercial activities.

The arrival of freed slaves in Sierra Leone marked a pivotal moment in the history of Christian missions in West Africa. Following the establishment of the settlement, numerous religious organizations dispatched missionaries to the region, with the goal of converting the local population to Christianity. Several religious groups that relocated for this purpose included the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (both under the Anglican Church), the German Basel Mission, the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, the Baptists, the Glasgow Missionary Society, the London Missionary Society, the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, and the Roman Catholic Church.[\[12\]](#)

The first attempt at missionary work began in 1792 under the leadership of Rev. Melville Horne of the Anglican Church in Britain.[\[13\]](#) However, it was discovered after the frequent deaths of Europeans that the only way to successfully carry out missionary work in West Africa was to train Africans who could assist in spreading Christianity among their own people. Thus, missionary work commenced in Sierra Leone in 1804 when the CMS sent missionary groups to the region and undertook the translation of the Holy Bible into African languages, specifically Ashanti and Twi, to make religious texts more accessible to the local population.[\[14\]](#) The expansion of missionary work in Sierra Leone was so significant that it led to the historic ordination of the first African into the Anglican Ministry of Sierra Leone in 1843. This pioneering figure was Rev. Ajayi Crowther, a former slave of Yoruba descent. Crowther's remarkable journey saw him rise to become the Bishop of the Niger in 1864; the first African to hold such a prestigious position within the Anglican Church.[\[15\]](#)

Christianity, Anglicanism in particular, was successfully planted amongst the Yoruba population in the year 1844, due to the efforts of freed Yoruba slaves in Freetown.[\[16\]](#) The Igbo Association in Freetown was motivated to do the same amongst their tribesmen in Nigeria. The Association, through Bishop Vidal, petitioned the Local Committee of the CMS in Freetown to extend Christianity to Igbo land.[\[17\]](#) Prior to this, the British Government had launched an expedition to the Niger in 1854, and the report about the potential for missionary work in the region had reached the CMS in London. Subsequently, the CMS organized a missionary outreach to Niger under the leadership of Rev. J.C Taylor, who was of Igbo descent. Taylor and his team departed for Onitsha in 1857.[\[18\]](#) Rev. Samuel Ajayi Crowther was instructed by the CMS authority to join the team from the Yoruba mission as they made their way to Onitsha.[\[19\]](#) Leading the team, Rev. Crowther and his companions arrived at Onitsha on July 26, 1857. The following day, they were formally welcomed by the traditional ruler of Onitsha, Obi Akazua, and his council of elders. Subsequently, the church was established and the mission successfully inaugurated in Igbo land.[\[20\]](#)

It is interesting to note that the Niger Mission of the mid-19th century did not stop at Onitsha. Following the successful launch of the mission, Crowther departed for Lokoja, and Taylor resumed his leadership of the

Igbo mission, to which he was fully dedicated.[\[21\]](#) Initially, due to a shortage of missionary personnel and differing evangelistic strategies between Crowther and Taylor, the mission faced challenges in expanding beyond Onitsha to other parts of Igbo land. While Taylor emphasized the urgent need to spread the gospel to other towns and villages, Crowther advocated for strengthening the base in Onitsha before initiating any outreach efforts.[\[22\]](#)

The expansion of the mission to Bonny in 1864 was a result of a specific request from the king of Bonny. Despite efforts to occupy various locations such as Obosi, Oko, Nsugbe, and Nkwelle by Taylor, these attempts were largely unsuccessful. However, in 1872 and 1874, significant outstations were established in Osomari and Asaba respectively.[\[23\]](#) Additionally, the mission was extended to Obosi by the Onitsha station at a later time. This gradual expansion led to each mission center initiating evangelistic outreaches and contributed to the overall growth of the mission on the Niger and to other parts of Nigeria.

It is eminently important to note that the CMS team in the course of its mission perceived Nigeria as one of the strongholds of Satan in the “Dark Continent of Africa” and considered itself as God’s agents of redemption.[\[24\]](#) This racist and cultural arrogance, borne out of European feeling of racial superiority and civilization, pitched them against the cultural and theological beliefs of the people who were fervent worshippers of local deities. The CMS missions eventually prevailed, despite the challenges they faced with practitioners of traditional religion in Nigeria.

Benjamin C.D. Diara and Nche George Christian have attributed the success of the CMS Christian Missions in Nigeria to the power of the Holy Spirit![\[25\]](#) Historically speaking, however, the success of the group was the result of its multifaceted approach, which encompassed evangelism the provision of free education and healthcare, social welfare services, their cultural sensitivity and adaptation.[\[26\]](#) By addressing various aspects of Nigerian life and society, the CMS effectively established a lasting presence and impact that contributed to their achievements in spreading Christianity throughout Nigeria. Thus, the Anglican Church made history as one of the pioneering mission societies in the introduction of Christianity in Nigeria. As an Evangelical church, it brought with it some of the characteristics of Pentecostalism, which is an integral part of the Evangelical tradition embodied by the Anglican Church.[\[27\]](#) Although the Pentecostal influence introduced by the Anglican Church did not immediately take root, its potential persisted, until a number of contradictions in the 20th century made it to manifest, with dire consequences.

SECESSIONIST MOVEMENT WITHIN THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION IN NIGERIA

Secessionist movement within the Anglican Communion in Nigeria is traceable to events during the 19th century. The impacts of these events not only inspired Nigerian converts within the Anglican Church, but also became the fulcrum upon which the breakaway was made possible. One of the events was the efforts of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther, who was one of the first African bishops consecrated by the Church of England, which met with stiff resistance from England. Crowther played a pivotal role in advocating for greater autonomy for African Christians within the Anglican Church.[\[28\]](#) His leadership and vision were predicated on the prejudice he suffered from white missionaries who not only questioned his moral values and competence, but also undermined his missions until he resigned.[\[29\]](#) His efforts laid the groundwork for a distinctively Nigerian expression of Anglicanism and the rise of African churches with Pentecostal traits.

The Pan-Africanist thoughts and ideals of Reverend Father Edward Wilmot Blyden, an American-Liberian who was very active in the West African sub-region and widely considered the father of African nationalism was another important figure. His writings encouraged and promoted what became known as cultural nationalism, which inspired African elite to strongly resist the powerful influence of Western culture and civilization. In essence, he called on Africans to hold on to the uniqueness of their cultures, customs and

traditions, while paying keen attention to the contributions of Africans to the continent, as opposed to European attempts to externalize all developments in Africans to their activities. Blyden's contributions made a lasting impression on the minds of Africans and on the political, social, economic and religious landscape of the continent because he impressed on them the need to either remain Africans or Africanize what the Europeans had introduced/imposed on them. Particularly, he criticized the domination of Churches by the whites and argued that native churches be established by Africans. He was said to have toured Lagos in 1901 to expound on how his vision for an Africanized Christianity could become a reality.[\[30\]](#)

Blyden's efforts were supported and popularized by the works of another Liberian, John Payne Jackson. Jackson's pioneering newspaper, *the Lagos Weekly Record*, exposed and criticized British activities in West Africa between 1890 and 1918. In furtherance of Blyden's cultural nationalism, Jackson clearly brought out the need for Africans of various backgrounds to unite and work towards preserving their common identity in the phase of radical European expansion in the region.[\[31\]](#) In addition, he encouraged Africans to protest European activities when necessary. Historical sources alluded to the fact that he popularized protest movement within British West Africa in his editorials. These publications were said to have influenced the emergence of newspapers such as *the Nigerian Times*, *the Nigerian Chronicles* and *the Lagos Standard*.[\[32\]](#) Undoubtedly, these newspapers and pamphlets awakened the consciousness of Nigerians across all sectors of the West African societies.

One of the notable areas affected by the increasing consciousness amongst the elite that resulted from these consequential events in Nigeria was the secessionist movements within the Anglican Church. The movements were part of the protests against white domination in pre-colonial and colonial Nigeria. It started from the Anglican Church during the last decade of the 19th century and expanded through the 20th century. The first breakaway church was the United Native African Church founded in 1891. The Anglican Church suffered another secession in 1901, when some of its members set up the African Church Inc. in 1917.[\[33\]](#) It is important to note that some of the leaders of secessions were anti-imperialist and took part in some of the protest movements organized against the British in Lagos.[\[34\]](#)

The expansion of the secessionist movements through the 1920s influenced the founding of United African Native Church (UANC) in Nigeria in 1933 by a Nigerian priest named Moses Orimolade Tunolase. This native church gave birth to what has become known as the Aladura (the "praying people" or "people of prayer) movement in Western Nigeria, which has spread across Nigeria and even beyond the shores of the country. The movement has a lot to do with Pentecostal beliefs and traditions, though its founders sought to create a form of Christianity that was more in tune with African cultural values and traditions.[\[35\]](#) For instance, one of the key features of the Aladura movement which makes it Pentecostal in outlook is its emphasis on divine healing, deliverance from evil spirits, and the power of prayer. All of these are aspects of African Traditional Religion (ATR). More so, adherents believe in the efficacy of prayers for healing and deliverance, personal holiness, moral purity, and strict compliance to biblical teachings. The movement was led by and continues to be led by charismatic leaders who are believed to possess spiritual gifts such as prophecy, healing, and speaking in tongues (Glossolalia), typical of the Pentecostal movement.

The Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), a prominent Christian denomination in Nigeria, contributed greatly to the development of indigenous Pentecostal movement in Nigeria. The CAC was a breakaway from the Apostolic Church (Faith Tabernacle), which had been invited by the Aladura movement to further the course of its variant of the Christian faith.[\[36\]](#) Its leader, Apostle Ayo Joseph Babalola, contributed immensely to the growth of Pentecostal Christianity in Nigeria through his fervent evangelism, miraculous healings, and an emphasis on the Holy Spirit's power. The C.A.C.'s international expansion has been driven by missionary activities and the migration of members to different parts of the world, with strong emphasis on charismata (spiritual gifts), including speaking in tongues, prophecy, and healing.[\[37\]](#)

From the foregoing, it is clear that Pentecostalism is indigenous to Nigeria through the secessionist

movements within the Anglican Communion, contrary to the claims often peddled by scholars that it was the result of the Holiness movement of the late 19th century by Palmer and the William J. Seymour led Azusa Street Revival in the United States between 1906 and 1909.[\[38\]](#) The influence of these revivals only accentuated the pace of the indigenous movements already discussed and also defined the current state of the Pentecostal movement, which may be described as modern Pentecostalism. It is also clear that the secessionist movements within the Anglican Communion, which gave birth to indigenous Pentecostal movements, were the result of contradictions within the colonial state, which resulted in protest against the inferior status of Africans in the white dominated churches in colonial Nigeria.

The leaders of the secessionist movements rose up to the occasion and criticized the white dominated churches of insensitivity to the cultural uniqueness of Africans, their beliefs and needs in the colonial period. Thus, it could be argued that as Christianity took root in colonial Nigeria, tensions emerged between the local adherents and the foreign missionaries who held positions of authority within the church. The issue of racial discrimination and inequality within the church was frowned at because many Nigerian Anglicans felt that they were treated as second-class members by their European counterparts, leading to a sense of alienation and discontent among the local congregations. Furthermore, theological differences also played a role in driving the secessionist movement. Some Nigerian Anglicans sought to embrace a more indigenous form of Christianity that resonated with their cultural beliefs and practices, rather than adhering strictly to the doctrines and liturgical traditions imported from England.[\[39\]](#)

In response, a number of Nigerian nationalists/religious leaders began to develop new religious movements that sought to combine elements of traditional African religions with Christianity. Hence, secessionist movements within the Anglican Church were fuelled by a desire for self-governance and greater representation within the church hierarchy. Nigerian Anglicans felt that they were being marginalized and excluded from decision-making processes that directly affected their religious practices and communities. Additionally, there were concerns about cultural imperialism and the imposition of European customs and traditions on African worshippers.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE SECESSIONIST MOVEMENTS ON THE CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE OF NIGERIA

The attainment of Nigerian independence from Britain in 1960 did not slow down the rapid expansion of the Pentecostal movement. Before 1970, evangelical Christianity was primarily present in higher institutions through interdenominational Christian student organizations, such as the Student Christian Movement (SCM) and Scripture Union (SU).[\[40\]](#) These organizations played a significant role in the emergence of modern Pentecostal movement. Also, during the 1960s, the Southern Church Movement (SCM) and the Conservative Union (CU) coexisted alongside one another until the modern Pentecostal movement, with its characteristic excessiveness brought about a significant shift in the religious landscape. The shift was brought about as a result of the spread of the Pentecostal and charismatic ideals beyond the American continent, through literature, radio broadcasts and missions.[\[41\]](#)

The Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) had a significant impact on the growth of Pentecostalism in Nigeria. The war led to social, political, and economic upheaval, which created a conducive environment for the spread of the movement. Therefore, the period saw a surge in religious fervor and a search for spiritual solace among the badly affected populace, leading to the rise of Pentecostalism as a prominent and alternate religious movement in Nigeria.

It is a well-known fact that the Nigerian Civil War resulted in widespread disruption of people, loss of lives and destruction of property. The chaos and uncertainty occasioned by the war pushed many Nigerians into seeking spiritual meaning and comfort. This environment of uncertainty provided a fertile ground for the

growth of Pentecostalism, due to the denomination's message of hope, divine intervention, and personal empowerment, made possible through spiritual experiences in the form of speaking in tongues, healing, etc. [42] The focus on individual spirituality, miracles, and deliverance appealed to those seeking tangible manifestations of divine intervention during a time of profound crisis. As a result, many individuals turned to leaders of the emerging Pentecostal movements and their charismatic leaders for solace and meaning, amidst the chaos of war.

The daunting task of post-war reconstruction and recovery that followed the end of the Civil War was also critical in solidifying the movement. Campus fellowships broke out in universities in Southern Nigeria. These were supported by home fellowships, prayer houses and street evangelism, meant to attract people into their fold. [43] The youths who led the movement were concerned that Orthodox Christianity in the country was docile and without the power of the Holy Ghost, which characterized the life and ministry of the first century apostles of Jesus Christ. They argued that the evangelistic missions of the foundational apostles were fruitful because of the demonstration of power in the form of healings, deliverance, miracles, prophecy, speaking in tongues, etc. [44]

For example, in 1971, a group of Christians in Warri came together to establish the Youth Evangelical Movement, which was later renamed Souls' Harvesters. [45] Many of the founding members were part of the Scripture Union group in the town. This marked the beginning of a significant evangelical movement in Nigeria. Two years later, in 1973, the Deeper Christian Life Ministry was founded in Lagos by W. F. Kumuyi, who at the time was a mathematics lecturer at the University of Lagos. [46] This new ministry brought a fresh perspective to Christian teachings and attracted a growing following of college age people. Around the same time, in late 1973, the Maranatha Evangelical Christian Ministry was established in Ogbomoso by Bisola Adeniran, a prominent leader of the World Action Team for Christ (WATC). [47] This further contributed to the diversification of evangelical movements in Nigeria. In addition to these developments, the Christian Fellowship Group was formed in Ado Ekiti also in late 1973 by Segun Tubi, a pharmacist and graduate of the University of Ife. [48] These organizations emerged as part of a broader reconstruction of religious affiliation following the charismatic revival that had disrupted existing affiliations such as the SCM and the CU, while also alleviating existing tensions within the religious landscape.

In Eastern Nigeria, the emergence of charismatic/Pentecostal movements was delayed by one or two years due to the Civil War. When these movements eventually arose, they initially originated outside college campuses and were led by individuals without a college education. These movements began as evangelical revival and spiritual awakening initiatives led by the Hour of Freedom Evangelistic Association, which was established in late 1969. [49] By 1971, the movement had evolved into a Pentecostal movement under the influence of Scripture Union traveling secretaries, Mike Oye and Muiwa Olamijulo, both graduates of the University of Ibadan and members of the Apostolic Faith Church. The movement found support in the Scripture Union Pilgrims' Groups, particularly in Enugu and Umuahia, before dispersing and leading to the establishment of charismatic organizations. One prominent organization that emerged during this time was the Master's Vessels Group, formed in Umuahia around 1973. [50]

The first charismatic organization in Northern Nigeria was established in 1974 by a group of graduates from the University of Ibadan and the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, who were fulfilling their mandatory one-year National Youth Service. [51] These graduates, while being hosted on the campus of Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria in July 1974, were surprised to find that evangelism was not a prominent aspect of evangelical Christianity among students and graduates. They formed a small group primarily consisting of former Christian Union members from Ibadan, as well as a few individuals from Lagos, Ife, and Nsukka. The purpose of this group was to maintain the spiritual atmosphere prevalent on southern Nigerian campuses and to coordinate evangelistic activities in Zaria. [52]

The group of graduates did not disband, even after most of them completed their service in June 1975. A few graduates who had been leaders in the earlier group and had taken up employment in Northern Nigeria utilized the foundation that had already been established to create the Calvary Ministries. In response to the situation in the predominantly Muslim north, the Calvary Ministries were established as a missionary organization. This was highly significant as it marked the first time that Nigerian graduates recognized that evangelistic activities in Northern Nigeria could be carried out by Nigerians themselves. Over the next one or two years, the Calvary Ministries served as a model for the formation of other charismatic organizations in Northern Nigeria.

Therefore, one of the notable impacts of the secessionist movements in colonial Nigeria is the proliferation and rapid growth of Pentecostal churches across the length and breadth of Nigeria. According to a recent study by the Pew Research Center, for instance, the percentage of Nigerians who identify as Pentecostals has increased from just 3% in 1980 to over 40% in 2018 and 63% today.[\[53\]](#) This growth has been driven by the increasing popularity of Pentecostal churches and the expansion of their reach into rural areas and other parts of the country. This is in addition to their provision of aid, education, and social support to these communities. This involvement has helped to consolidate their influence as key institutions addressing both spiritual and practical needs of Nigerians, especially, the poor.

It is clear from the foregoing analysis that the secessionist movement has had far-reaching implications for both the Anglican Communion in Nigeria and for Christianity as a whole in Nigeria. The establishment of an autonomous Nigerian church empowered local clergy and congregations to take ownership of their faith community, leading to a resurgence of indigenous leadership and theological expression. It has, for example, led to the formation of an independent Nigerian church, known as the Church of Nigeria (the Anglican Communion) in 1979,[\[54\]](#) which is now one of the largest and most influential Christian denominations in the country. The Church of Nigeria has grown into one of the largest provinces within the global Anglican Communion, with millions of members across thousands of parishes. Its influence extends beyond religious matters, as it has been actively involved in social justice initiatives, education, healthcare, and community development throughout Nigeria.[\[55\]](#)

The changes in Church leadership structure that came about primarily due to the formation of independence churches in Nigeria were equally significant; as new denominations were formed, indigenous leaders emerged to assume positions of authority and influence. This shift in leadership dynamics challenged the traditional colonial hierarchy established by foreign missionary bodies and paved the way for a more inclusive and representative leadership model within the Nigerian church. Indigenous leaders played a crucial role in shaping the direction and ethos of these newly formed denominations, contributing to a sense of ownership and agency among local Christian communities. Additionally, the new denominations often espoused theological interpretations that resonated more closely with indigenous cultural values and belief systems. This has led to a reevaluation of doctrinal teachings and practices, as well as a reinterpretation of Christian theology through an African lens. The diversification of theological perspectives enriched the religious landscape in Nigeria and fostered a deeper engagement with faith that is largely rooted in local contexts. However, divergent theological perspectives and doctrines have also led to ultra-Christian teachings and practices that are antithetical to the axiomatic of the Christian faith.[\[56\]](#)

Furthermore, the secessionist movement has intensified competition among Christian denominations in Nigeria, especially the Pentecostal fold, for membership, influence and financial gains. This stems out from the fact that the added diversity to the religious environment brought about by the proliferation of churches has provided individuals with more options for spiritual affiliations. The result has been continuous efforts by Pentecostal churches to strengthen their appeal and outreach, in order to retain and attract more members, amidst a more competitive religious landscape. Consequently, evangelism has dramatically changed from converting non-believers to Christianity to winning members from one church to another.

CONCLUSION

The paper argues that internal contradictions within the Anglican Communion hold the key to understanding the historical origins of Pentecostalism in Nigeria. The contradictions that bred a fertile ground for secession from the Church were primarily domination of the Church by the white missionaries in leadership and functions. This racist approach to church administration did not go down well with the local population, which felt dominated and relegated to the background. The paper also contends that the decision to secede was largely the result of the influence of pan-Africanists such as E.W. Blyden and J.P Jackson, who propagated the idea of cultural nationalism, which favored the prioritization of African culture over those of European imperialists. These ideals were supported by Rev. Samuel Ajayi Crowther, who was himself a victim of racism within the Anglican Communion.

The paper also shows that the indigenous churches grew exponentially within a short period because of their combination of Christian values and African cultures and traditions. These local churches were patronized because of their emphasis on spiritual powers, which is closely associated with the traditional African religion that they had been used too. Furthermore, the paper observes that political and economic crises soon after the attainment of independence gave fresh impetus to the movement. The result was that the Pentecostal movement spread like a wildfire on Nigerian campuses, resulting in the birth of modern Pentecostal churches in Nigeria. Similarly, the search for independence from the global Anglican Communion culminated in the birth of the autonomous Church of Nigeria in 1979. As a result, the Christian landscape of Nigeria was expanded, with divergent theological and doctrinal perspectives, leading to conflict of interests and ideology within the body of Christ in Nigeria. The situation has negatively impacted Nigerian churches, given the extent of unhealthy rivalry that has engulfed churches that are meant to be united for the sole purpose of propagating the gospel throughout the country. The secessionist movement served as a catalyst for broader discussions about decolonization within African Christianity, inspiring similar movements in other denominations across the continent. It also highlighted issues related to cultural identity, power dynamics, and ecclesiastical authority within religious institutions in contemporary Nigerian societies.

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FOOTNOTE

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[2] Catholic Liturgy refers to the set of rituals that are observed by Catholics’, especially during an official worship service. On the other hand, Pentecostal theology means the systematised methods of biblical interpretation and practices in the Pentecostal denomination.

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[6] Benjamin C.D. Diara & Nche George Christian, “Anglican Church and the Development of Pentecostalism in Igbo land,” *Journal of Educational and Social Research* 3, no. 10 (December 2013): 43-55, (MC SER Publishing, Rome-Italy).

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- [20] Diara & Christian, “Anglican Church and the Development of Pentecostalism in Igbo land”, 43-55.
- [21] Diara & Christian, “Anglican Church and the Development of Pentecostalism in Igbo land”, 43-55.
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- [24] J. C. Umeh, “The Growth of Christianity in Igbo land: An Historical Survey of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) in Anambra State, 1857-1990” (Owerri: Centre for International Studies and Development, University of Nigeria), 2010, 81-89.
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- [31] O.O. Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, “The United African Native Church of Nigeria: A Historical and Theological Overview.” *Journal of African Religion* 1, no. 2 (1983), P.p. 157-174.
- [32] Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, “The United African Native Church of Nigeria”, 165.
- [33] A.A. Ademola, “The United African Native Church in Nigeria: A Study of its Origins and Growth.” *Journal of Religious Studies* 26(2) (1988), P.p. 243-256. Although there were other secessionist’s movements within the Methodist Church, they do not fall within the scope of this study.
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