

A Prognostic Analysis of the Commercialization of Religion and its Impacts on Students in Nigerian Universities

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Abstract

This study examined the commercialization of religion in Nigerian universities. It provides a critique of the nature of Pentecostalism that is booming in the Nigerian religious market. The growth, vibrancy, and increased visibility of Christian fellowships in Nigerian universities have received less scholarly attention, notwithstanding their negative impacts on campus students. This study focuses on campus fellowships that tend to exploit students. Some of these campus fellowships have no mother church; they are being established by students (graduate and undergraduate) who manipulate religion for their selfish aims and objectives. This is a qualitative study using a phenomenological approach. Purposive sampling was used to determine the eligibility of the 13 students interviewed. Findings reveal that campus fellowships exploit students' money, time, and material resources. It also increases the level of female sexual abuse on campus and the number of fellowship students who became external students. Further, the study provides a Biblical model for campus fellowships and important recommendations.

Keywords: Karl Marx, religion, fellowships on campus, Nigerian universities, commercialization of religion

Introduction

Amid increasing poverty among students at tertiary institutions, campus fellowships have continued to wax stronger financially. Religion and spirituality have had a far-reaching influence on the behavior of Nigerians. Religiosity has been documented to be a

protective factor in the lives of young people.¹ Nigerians have this deep belief that there is the influence of providence in every issue of life and that the predicament that befalls one is due to the neglect of one of the principles of religion. Before the rise of contemporary Pentecostalism, religion functioned as an ethical tool and a social welfare scheme for people with low incomes in society.² Also, historical figures like Martin Luther King and Mother Teresa of Calcutta utilized religion to confront social issues and injustices.

Religion seems to be the binding cord between Nigerians and the Supreme Being. Nigerians are very enthusiastic about conducting themselves in a religious manner so as not to offend the god of their religion. This was in line with John Mbiti's assertion that when one shows this pious disposition, that entails being "notoriously religious."³ Religion permeates every aspect of life, making it difficult, if not impossible, to separate it. Nigerians apply their religiosity to all aspects of their lives, including their economic, social, cultural, and, more recently, educational lives. The influence of religion is increasing in primary schools, secondary schools, and, more recently, in institutions of higher learning, especially in universities.

Nigeria's tertiary institutions have recently had an increasing number of churches and fellowships on campus. Sometimes, fellowships exist in some of the classrooms in institutions of higher learning. The common name known to be given to these fellowships is "campus fellowship." This is because they draw their memberships from campus students. The rate of patronage these fellowships have enjoyed has become a source of worry because of the narratives of their activities. Their focus on tithes and offerings obscures the moral and spiritual objectives of these fellowships. There are sad stories emanating from the stories of students.

¹ Oluwaseyi Somefun, "Religiosity and Sexual Abstinence among Nigerian Youths: Does Parent Religion Matter?" *BMC Public Health* 19 (2019): 1-11.

² Jaco Beyers, "The effect of religion on poverty," *HTS: Theological Studies* 70, no. 1 (2014): 1-8.0(1), 1-8.

³ John S. Mbiti, *African religions & philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1990), 27.

R. C. Alcorn reveals that some campus pastors tell their members, “We are God’s money managers.”⁴ Oluwaseun Afolabi, Solomon Ojo, & Oderinde Ayoola revealed that in these fellowships⁵ God has been converted into services and marketable products.⁶ This statement is meant to push students to bring more money and materials. Students are coerced psychologically by this statement. Consider a student who gives his phone as a seed to the fellowship because the campus pastor said that givers never lack; or a student who takes the school fees that his parents gave him because the campus pastor promises that anything given to God will be returned tenfold. The activities of these campus leaders and pastors point towards the philosophy of Karl Marx. These campus fellowship churches make money by selling books written by the pastors and CDs and DVDs of sermons, but much of their revenue is said to come from donations from students who are struggling to make ends meet at university.⁷ This is a problematic phenomenon.

Karl Heinrich Marx (1818–1883) declared religion the “opium of the people.”⁸ His philosophy questions the role of religion in society. It seems that Karl Marx’s philosophy is observable in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria. Thus, students take their money for feeding, buying textbooks, paying school fees, and other sundry items and give them to the *spiritual daddy*. These campus pastors, having understood the power of religion in destabilizing the sense of reasoning of students, continue to manipulate religion,

⁴ R. C. Alcorn, *The Law of Rewards: Giving What You Can’t Keep to Gain What You Can’t Lose* (Carol Stream, IL.: Tyndale House Publishers 2003), 23.

⁵ Oluwaseun O. Afolabi, Solomon Ayantayo Ojo, and Oderinde Peter Ayoola. “Commoditization of God in religion: Marketing ‘Pentecostalism’ in the Nigerian public space,” *Journal of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity* (2024): 1-24.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ T. Oladipo, “Nigeria: Where religion is big business,” <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14573660>, accessed, 22 August 2024.

⁸ D. T. McLellan & L. S. Feuer, “Karl Marx German philosopher” <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Karl-Marx>, accessed, 22 August 2024.

projecting giving as the essence of enjoying God's patronage. They establish three important values and associated practices to coerce their followers. These values are divine advice, advice from clergy, and other religiously oriented advice about money and work that have important merit.⁹

Literature has investigated the problems of the increasing number of churches and fellowships in Nigeria.¹⁰ Scholars have also examined the exploitative tendencies and activities of these institutions.¹¹ This research aims to unveil the reasons for the increasing influence of campus fellowships and churches on Nigeria's universities. Existing literature has not explored the issue of the increasing exploitation of students by campus churches and fellowships in Nigerian universities.

This study aims to offer a prognostic analysis of the commercialization of religion in Nigerian universities and its impact on students. First, it examines the nexus between religion and poverty. Second, it discusses the reasons students join campus fellowships. Third, it discusses the commercialization of religion in Nigerian universities.

⁹ Lisa A. Keister, "Conservative Protestants and Wealth: How Religion Perpetuates Asset Poverty," *American Journal of Sociology* 113, no. 5 (2008): 1237-1271.

¹⁰ Chukwuma A. Etete, "Proliferation of Churches and the Phenomenal Moral Decadence in Nigeria," *Zaria Journal of Educational Studies (ZAJES)* 20, no. 1 (2019): 9-15. Walter Chikwendun Ihejirika, and Godwin B. Okon, "Mega Churches and Megaphones: Nigerian Church Leaders and their Media Ministries," *A Moving Faith: Mega Churches Go South* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2015), 62.

¹¹ Dare Ojo Omonijo, M. T. Nwodo, C. O. Uche, and N. E. Ezechukwu, "The Proliferation of Churches and Moral Decadence in Nigeria: Socio-economic and Religious Implications," *Scholars Bulletin: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 2, no. 11 (2016): 613-621; John O. Magbadelo, "Pentecostalism in Nigeria: Exploiting or Edifying the Masses?" *African Sociological Review/Revue Africaine de Sociologie* 8, no. 2 (2004): 15-29.

Method

This is a qualitative case study using a phenomenological approach. This approach helps us to understand the lived experiences of students. Data was collected through in-depth interviews (IDI) with thirteen (13) students from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Data was also collected from relevant academic literature. The sampling model was purposive sampling. The primary objective of purposive sampling is to pinpoint the cases, individuals, or communities most relevant for addressing the research questions.¹² Also, it helps in the “identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest.”¹³ The data was analyzed using content analysis.

Religion and Poverty in Nigeria

Before the coming of Christianity, religion in traditional African society was used to protect the masses. Religion was the only effective and accessible institutional mechanism that the majority of oppressed masses could use in traditional societies to articulate their grievances.¹⁴ Also, “religion has continued to be a central part of societies and human experience, shaping how individuals react to the environments in which they live.”¹⁵ No doubt, religion has helped ameliorate the plights of the people in

¹² K. Nikolopoulou, “What Is Purposive Sampling?”, <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/purposive-sampling/>, accessed January 22, 2024.

¹³ Lawrence A Palinkas, Sarah M. Horwitz, Carla A. Green, Jennifer P. Wisdom, Naihua Duan, and Kimberly Hoagwood, “Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research,” *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research* 42 (2015): 533-544.

¹⁴ Ram Puniyani , “Religion: Opium of the Masses or ...” In Ram Puniyani, ed., *Religion, Power and Violence: Expression of Politics in Contemporary Times* (London: Sage Publications, 2005), 27-44 .

¹⁵ Akinfenwa Oluwaseun, Fagbamilola Olumide David, and Abdulganiyu Abolore Issa, “The Role of Religion in Modern Society: Masses Opium or Tool for Development: A Case Study of Saw-Mill Area, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria,” *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* 6, no. 1 (2014): 8-17.

traditional Nigerian society. Unfortunately, the reverse is not the case, as religion has turned into a tool for exploiting the poor and giving them false hope. In Nigeria, the oppressors use religion to make the oppressed feel better and more submissive. Religion is synonymous with militancy, and weapons and ammunition have become essential parts of religious apparel. Most places in Nigeria are being destroyed, and the properties and sources of livelihood of the people are being destroyed. This has sent many Nigerians into poverty due to their inability to provide basic human needs for themselves and their children.

Amid the increasing number of churches in Nigeria, which promise social and economic liberation, poverty amongst Nigerians has escalated. In this article, poverty refers to a person's inability to feed, find shelter, or provide clothing. In the words of Augustyn, poverty is the state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions.¹⁶ In fact, Nigeria has been the poverty capital of the world since 2018. According to statistics, there are about 93.9 people in Nigeria who are currently living below the poverty line.¹⁷ This below-the-poverty line entails that this set of Nigerians are living in extreme poverty, earning less than a dollar a day.

No doubt, churches are on the increase in different centers in Nigeria. One would have expected to see enormous social impacts and change in the lives of the people. It is also known that many of these churches are owned by people whose ulterior motive is to exploit their unsuspecting members. Religious leaders cite various verses and chapters of the Scriptures to buttress their selfish sermons. The unsuspecting members go as far as borrowing loans to offer offerings. Most of them fail to repay these loans, and thus, they face more problems and challenges. Instead of religion relieving them of their problems as promised, religion is known

¹⁶ A. Augustyn, "Poverty: a Sociology," <https://www.britannica.com/topic/rural-society>, accessed April 6, 20a23.

¹⁷ P. Uzoho, "Report: Nigeria Still Poverty Capital of the World" *This Day*, accessed 6 September 2021. <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2021/09/06/report-nigeria-still-poverty-capital-of-the-world/>

to be a burden to them. Religious leaders use religion to justify inequalities, poverty, and the exploitation of their victims.¹⁸

In Christianity in Nigeria today, most religious leaders prefer to receive their reward here and now.¹⁹ They also believe that receiving an earthly reward does not exclude the future one that the Lord will give to His faithful ones.²⁰ Corroborating this thesis, H. McLeod mentions that religious leaders used religious language, that is, manipulated religious language, to curb social protests from their followers, who are mostly Christians.²¹

Unfortunately, several women have been victims of the crooked motives of religious leaders. Single ladies looking for husbands have been sexually abused by pastors masquerading as men of God. Many married women have also engaged in adultery. Women are taught to be submissive and to lower their voices.²² Also, some women have used the money their husbands gave them for family upkeep to sow seeds into the lives of their pastors. In the words of A. Akerele, this problem is a product of our rotten culture,

¹⁸ G. Schweiger, "Religion and Poverty, Humanities and Social Sciences Communications," *Palgrave Communications* (2019), 5:59.

¹⁹ M. A. Adeoye, "The Shared Foundations of Faith in Christianity and Islam: The Role of Monotheism in Life and Afterlife Across Abrahamic Religions," *At-Turost: Journal of Islamic Studies* 11 (2024): 65-79; U. Onunwa, Humanistic basis for African traditional religious theology and ethics:(a challenge to the Church in Nigeria). *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture, and Religions*, 1(1), (2011): 39-61.

²⁰ Jonathan. D. James, "Introduction" in *A Moving Faith: Mega Churches Go South*, edited by (Washington DC and Delhi: Sage, 2015), 18.

²¹ H. McLeod, *Secularisation in Western Europe, 1848–1914* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000).

²² D. Egbung, *In Nigeria, Religious Abuse Perpetuates Violence Against Women and Girls*, <https://awra-group.org/in-nigeria-religious-abuse-perpetuates-violence-against-women-and-girls/>, accessed 16 August 2023.

particularly the preponderance of fallen values in Nigerian society, and is ably assisted by our evil culture of silence.²³

This is based on the promise of money doubling promised to them by the religious leader. These women cannot report some of their abuses because they are made to know that, as women, they should be silent. They are coerced through religious manipulation not to challenge existing norms with religious biases and bases.

Also, religion is manipulated in such a way that the masses are made to believe that they can only be blessed if they bring more money to God. This is why religion is seen as a terrain of power struggle, principally because whoever captures or controls this terrain can use it to advance interests.²⁴ The clergy always emphasized that the only way to come out of poverty is to give more and more money for the development of the church. Religious leaders have built a temple of materialism from which they hold the befuddled Nigerian populace in a trance-like grip on the pretense of holiness while their every deed and act spell materialism and nothing but materialism.²⁵ Due to the fact that most Nigerians are tired of their poverty state, they give in to the whims and caprices of these religious heads. While the owners of churches live big and luxurious lives, their members wallow in abject and extreme poverty. It was in this light that I. Raymond noted that the Nigerian government regards churches and other faith-based communities as charitable organizations and exempts them from paying taxes. Still, owners of churches in Nigeria plunder their followers and

²³ Ayo Akerele, "Marital abuse in the Nigerian church," *Premium Times*, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/opinion/524436-marital-abuse-in-the-nigerian-church-by-ayo-akerele.html?tztc=1>, accessed April 18, 2024.

²⁴ I. M. Enwerem, *A Dangerous Awakening the Politicization of Religion in Nigeria* (Ibadan: IFRA-Nigeria, 1995), 249- 252.

²⁵ Sahara, "The Gospel of Materialism – Nigerian Pentecostalism and Hypocrisy," <https://saharareporters.com/2008/09/26/gospel-materialism-%E2%80%93-nigerian-pentecostalism-and-hypocrisy>, accessed, 26 September 2023.

spend their spoils on self-indulgent existence.²⁶ This is why many pastors and church owners live in splendid wealth, ride the most expensive cars, live in beautiful houses, send their children to the best of schools, and take private jets to attend events to showcase their social status. In contrast, their followers live in abject and extreme poverty. This is religious capitalism, and it is in line with B. Geremek's assertion that capitalism is the origin of poverty.²⁷

Why do Students Join Campus Fellowships?

To begin with, some of the students on Nigerian university campuses are known to depend on their parents for their daily upkeep and sustenance. Some of these students even do menial jobs to augment their families' incomes for the shortfall that may result from the inadequacy of their families' funding of their schooling. However, many challenges befall students on campus and push them to join a campus church or fellowship. First, there is the quest for educational success. Many students want to graduate with good grades. In the words of Jude,

I joined two fellowships so that God would help me get good results. I do not know what is wrong when I read, and I easily forget. But I believe that joining fellowship will make God touch the lecturer and give me good grades. (Interview 1)

Students are prepared to do anything to ensure they graduate with a first- or second-class upper grade. Better results are considered a better response to the financial and physical assistance of their family members.

Second, there is the quest for family liberation. Many students on campus are troubled by the situation of their families. They

²⁶ I. Raymond, *Thoughts on the Abuse and Corruption in Nigerian Churches, and Why Religion Cannot Reform the World*, [https://saharareporters.com/2016/01/12/thoughts-abuse-and-corruption-nigerian-churches-and-why-religion-cannot-reform-world.](https://saharareporters.com/2016/01/12/thoughts-abuse-and-corruption-nigerian-churches-and-why-religion-cannot-reform-world/), accessed 12 January 2024.

²⁷ B. Geremek, *Poverty: A History*, trans. A. Kolakowska (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 45.

think daily about where their next meal's money or fees will come from. In the view of Esther,

I paid my tithe every month to my fellowship. My parents are poor, and it is only God who can provide for me. Whenever my parents succeed in sending me small amounts of money, I pay my tithe so that God can touch people who are gifting me money. Now I am owing debts, because I have no money, but I know God will provide for me because I am paying my tithes. (Interview 2)

They are hoping that the only solution is to join a fellowship. It is believed that the prayer of the fellowship leaders could improve the condition of their family for a better life. Third, students see campus fellowship and churches as the most accessible routes to obtaining a future husband or spouse. They feel that the church has potential husbands or wives for them. In the words of Hope,

Some persons join campus fellowships to be known to others and be available for marriage. In some fellowships, girls especially join the choir and ushering so that brothers can easily identify them for marriage. Some of these girls go to other fellowships when they cannot get husbands from their current fellowship on campus. (Interview 3)

These students also feel that they can push God to give them a husband or wife when they join workers in the church. They are prepared to do anything to achieve this. Sometimes, these students may even join two or three fellowships so that their chances of getting a good wife or husband may not be slim.

Fourth, students want to feel like part of a family of Christians on campus, a place where they can run to in times of trouble for safety. In the words of Faith,

The school fellowships have helped me a lot. There are times when I go to our fellowship leaders, and they are able to give me money and food. Sometimes, they have also contributed money to my school fees. I am not the

only one who has been helped by the fellowship; so have so many other people. (Interview 4)

Also, the charity aspect of the church is known even in churches outside the campus. Students are most often in need due to the many financial and moral challenges they face on campus. Some are orphans who may have no one to rely on.

Fifth, Christians join campus fellowships for spiritual growth and development. Relationships with other Christians, Bible study, prayer, love, and obedience to God's Word are all important components of spiritual development. In the words of Dayo,

When I stay among Christians on campus, I become spiritually more alert and stable. My prayer life has improved. My reading of the Bible has improved. I do not have a desire for immorality anymore. But anytime I stop attending fellowship, I see myself engaging in fornication. I see myself watching immoral films. My going to campus fellowships has always helped me. (Interview 5)

There is a growing incidence of this on Nigerian campuses. Some churches outside of campuses have started establishing branches of their churches on campus. According to Gift,

My church has to form its fellowship on campus because our members are joining other fellowships. Also, because our doctrine differs from other churches, I find it challenging to fellowship in other places. Our doctrine is different, hence the need to form our fellowship. (Interview 6)

Sometimes, the fellowships on campus gave rise to the formation of churches outside the campus. Before becoming large congregations outside campuses, churches like Deeper Life Bible Church and Winners Chapel were fellowships. Today, some of these campus fellowships are major funders of the activities of the megachurches.

Commercialization of Religion in Nigerian Universities

The commercialization of religion involves exchanging God's healing power for money. Due to the way religion is run as a business, the poor are most often the victims. Commercialization of religion involves manipulating the church and its services (spiritual and emotional) with the implied intention of exploiting members for economic or financial gain.²⁸ This is the situation of religion on Nigerian campuses, where most fellowships exist with a business strategy and legacy.

To manipulate religion, some people carry out their activities under the guise of fellowship. They have realized the growing number of students on campus and the physical and spiritual satisfaction they yearn for. In the words of Philip,

Campuses host thousands of students. The more members in the fellowships, the more tithes and offerings, and students are easily moulded to believe that it is only through fellowship they can have access to God, rather than directly linking the students to God. (Interview 7)

Some churches now see that students are looking for spiritual assistance and have flooded the campuses to fill this gap. Unfortunately, students who are supposed to be aided are exploited. Campus fellowships are all over; they can be found in classrooms, hostels, and the library. Some students who have graduated but have no job usually open fellowships under the guise that God has called them. In Joseph's experience,

In my school, my classroom was used as a fellowship space. We will be reading, and the fellowship members would enter and start speaking in tongues. With that sign, you will just find your way. (Interview 8)

²⁸ O. Fidelis, *The Deceit Business in Religion* (Enugu: Optimal Publishers, 1998); O. T. Clement, "John 2: 13-17 and its Implications for Church Commercialisation in Nigeria," *European Journal of Educational and Social Sciences*, 4 no.1 (2019): 47-54.

In Adaobi's view,

Some of these fellowships are formed by students who were once fellowship leaders, but due to a lack of jobs, they returned to the same school to form their fellowship. Some of them were zealous during their time as undergraduates, so due to the name they created for themselves, they easily gained more members from students who knew how serious they were. (Interview 9)

Most of the sermons in these campus fellowships focus on God's power to provide for our physical, economic, and spiritual needs. According to the preaching of some fellowships, the physical and economic needs involve God's provision of money and the granting of success in exams and all student endeavors. The spiritual need involves God's power to deliver from family curses and ancestral powers against progress. Of course, these fellowships have far exceeded their set goals. They have succeeded in making so much money from the students.

Students in campus fellowships are promised God's provision. The basis of God's provision lies in their ability to give more money to the fellowship they belong to. In the words of Agbo,

My fellowship pastor usually tells us that if we want our condition to change, we have to change the kind of money we give to God. Sometimes, there are cases where students give their feeding money to the fellowship. There are also cases where students give their school fees and even donate their phones to the fellowship they belong to. (Interview 10)

Students are encouraged to give overwhelmingly so that God can remove all their problems. With a statement like this, students do as they are told to avoid God's wrath. In Luke's experience,

There have been reports of students laying down their phones, laptops, and shoes at the altar of the campus fellowships as seeds with the hope that God will give them better phones, laptops, foreign shoes, and clothes and carry them miraculously outside the shores

*of Nigeria. The situation is indeed embarrassing.
(Interview 11)*

During exams, campus authorities usually insist that those who have not paid school fees should not be allowed to write exams. Some of these students miss exams, and when asked, they will tell the examiner or lecturer that they used their school fees to sow seed in the fellowship based on the preaching of their pastor on campus. If religious leaders know that the source of a donation is dubious or dishonest, and they still accept it, they are equally guilty of the sin.²⁹

Religion has really become the opium of the campus community. School authorities have tried to ensure fellowships register with the student affairs departments of the various universities. Instead of stemming this ugly tide, the activities of these ‘men of God’ on campus have continued to wax stronger unopposed. This confirms that Nigerians are intensely religious, not necessarily spiritual.³⁰ Some of these fellowships operate with the knowledge of the school authorities. Sometimes, the school authorities are careful not to seem to be trying to fight ‘Christianity’ off the campus.

To make more money, these fellowships organize deliverance services and crusades. Also, these fellowships can come together in a show of force and organize a program. They speak in tongues and prophesy fake prophecies to get more money. The churches or ministries select a particular day in a week to hold such special prayer sections or “ministration services” under various tags or

²⁹ C. Irekamba, “Why is Crime on the Increase Despite Innumerable Churches and Mosques?” *The Guardian*, <https://guardian.ng/features/why-is-crime-on-the-increase-despite-innumerable-churches-and-mosques/>, accessed 8 November 2015.

³⁰ Henri Mbaya, and Ntozakhe Cezula, “Contribution of John S Mbiti to the Study of African Religions and African Theology and Philosophy,” *Stellenbosch Theological Journal*, 5, no 3 (2019): 421-442.

names to bring healing, anointing, breakthroughs, and prosperity to its members.³¹

What about the time consumption of these fellowships on students' time? Students who are supposed to give more time to their books are made to spend a greater percentage of their time on fellowship. Peace opined that:

A student goes to fellowship in the morning and returns in the evening, but thereafter, the student becomes tired and cannot read. This is why most committed campus fellowship members usually perform poorly and are prone to staying longer than expected in school. (Interview 12)

This is in tandem with Omonijo et al.'s assertion that the business model in which fellowships operate is the same as that of the bourgeois of old, where the essence is to make a profit and have no concern for the welfare of the workers helping them.³²

Due to the type of preaching, some of these students have spent extra years in university. According to Ezekiel, a fellowship pastor preached that

God will punish any lecturer who thinks of failing you, and the students echo Amen. I, as your pastor, did not fail any course, and no lecturer born of a woman will fail you. The fire of the Holy Ghost will confuse him, and he will change your 07 to 70. (Interview 13)

With this homily, the student goes home with this mentality and avoids reading the books because 'God will punish any lecturer who thinks of failing him/her.' Unfortunately, these students offer more money to entice God to come to their aid during exams. Due

³¹ Irekamba, "Why is Crime on the Increase?" <https://guardian.ng/features/why-is-crime-on-the-increase-despite-innumerable-churches-and-mosques/>, accessed 8 November 2015.

³² Dare Ojo Omonijo, M. T. Nwodo, C. O. Uche, and N. E. Ezechukwu, "The Proliferation of Churches and Moral Decadence in Nigeria: Socio-economic and Religious Implications," *Scholars Bulletin: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 2, no. 11 (2016): 613-621.

to the constant manipulation of students on campus fellowships, religious leaders emphasize materialism or prosperity, not eternity. While prosperity aligns with God's plan for Christians, prioritizing it at the expense of holiness and righteousness, as seen in many Nigerian churches today, raises significant concerns and poses a substantial issue for the nation's development.³³

Some of the campus students live in a malnourished state. They use the money they should have used for feeding to give to the pastor with the hope of receiving a reward from the God of the pastor. Also, they bring their food to the 'welfare unit' of the campus fellowship because they have been promised that "givers never lack." Some parents are surprised when their children request more money for food, without any suspicion of the fact that pastors of fellowship on campus are milking their children for their money and food. These campus students are in dire poverty. In Amara's experience,

My friend's father sent her money for feeding. She took the money to pay for the vow she made in church. She started collecting food on credit from neighbors. I asked her why, and she said that it was the money she gave in the church that made God touch people to give her food on credit. (Interview 13)

There have also been reports of environmental pollution caused by the loudspeakers of these fellowships. Some serious students find it difficult to read their books due to the noise emanating from irregular fellowships spread all over the campus. S. Folarin revealed that this is because there are people turning uncompleted buildings on campus into churches. Where there is space, they mount their

³³ Dare Ojo Omonijo, Onyekwere Oliver Chizaram Uche, Obiajulu Anthony Ugochukwu Nnedum, and Bernard Chukwukeluo Chine, "Religion as the Opium of the Masses: A Study of the Contemporary Relevance of Karl Marx," *Asian Research Journal of Arts & Social Sciences* 1, no. 3 (2016): 1-7.

canopy with loudspeakers, organizing day and night vigils.³⁴ This was part of the experience of Heavance, thus:

*I walked up to the pastor and complained to him about how the noise was disturbing us, and they all concluded that I was possessed. They said the power in their praises was tormenting the demon that possessed me, and that was why I felt uncomfortable when they sang.*³⁵

It is also worthwhile to mention that some female students have been impregnated by these campus leaders. There are situations where female students go to the house of their campus leaders, wash their clothes for them, cook for them, and also have sex with them. Some of these students have committed so many abortions for their campus pastors. Yet, campus fellowships continue to spring up in different areas because more and more people are beginning to understand the power of religion and a society that prefers God to do everything for them while they sit down and watch.

A Biblical Model for Campus Fellowships to Improving the Nigerian Religious Market

A campus fellowship in the Nigerian context should strive to reflect the core values of faithful Christian theology while meeting students' unique needs and challenges in a culturally diverse academic environment. First, a faithful theological foundation is paramount, as it ensures that the teachings and practices of the fellowship are rooted in sound biblical doctrine centered on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Second, the place of the Bible is important for the growth of any campus fellowship.

³⁴ S. Folarin, "70% of Noise Pollution in Lagos State caused by Churches, Mosques –LASEPA GM, Fasawe," *The Punch*,. <https://punchng.com/70-of-noise-pollution-in-lagos-state-caused-by-churches-mosques-lasepa-gm-fasawe/#:~:text=Of%20the%204%2C700%20complaints%20we,making%20it%2070%20per%20cent>. accessed 8 January 2021.

³⁵ T. Heavance, "What Can I Do About Noise Pollution By A Church?" <https://www.nairaland.com/3537087/what-noise-pollution-church/4> , accessed 24 December 2023.

The pastors of campus fellowships should regularly emphasize the Bible as the ultimate authority for faith and practice, encouraging members to study and apply its teachings to their lives and relationships with fellow believers. Third, there is the need for Christ-centered discipleship training. Thus, there is the need to prioritize spiritual growth through discipleship, which would equip members to live out their faith on campus and beyond in the short and long run.

Evangelism is the foundational apparatus for growth. Leaders of campus fellowship should promote a culture of evangelism, where members are trained to share the gospel lovingly and respectfully, reflecting the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20). The success of evangelism should be backed by prayer and Bible study. Furthermore, members of campus fellowship should be enlightened on the need to live a consistent Christian life by showing acts of kindness, justice, and brotherly love. This love should be Christlike and humble, avoiding divisiveness or sectarianism within the campus fellowship (John 13:34–35). A biblically faithful campus fellowship should nurture individual believers and shine as a witness of Christ's love and truth on campus, fostering transformation in lives and the broader academic community.

Recommendations for Improving Nigerian Campus Fellowships

The following is believed to go a long way toward solving the problem of the manipulation of religion by pastors of campus fellowships:

1. There is a need for Vice Chancellors and Councils of tertiary institutions to regulate the number of fellowships that should be allowed on campus. Any fellowship without a mother church should be asked to vacate the campus.
2. There is also a need for students to be sensitized during orientation and not allow themselves to be used and exploited by campus fellowships. They should admonish

them not to use their school fees, feeding money, or house rent to sow seed.

3. Parents can also monitor how their children spend money. They can do this by always admonishing the child to be wise, even before entering school.
4. Regarding studies, during school orientation, school authorities should tell students that the essence of their coming to university is for their studies, but they should not neglect God. However, this is not the contemporary method of going to fellowship from Monday to Saturday with no time for studies.
5. Heads of Departments and Deans of Faculty should be discreet with issuing their classrooms and halls to fellowships only poised to maximize religion for their gains.
6. Female students are known for having the flair to befriend fellowship leaders and pastors. It is crucial for parents, school administrators, and lecturers to provide them with education and awareness about the importance of not allowing themselves to be treated as sexual objects by these campus pastors. Many of these campus pastors promise marriage but are only seeking sexual relationships.

Conclusion

There is an increasing exploitation of students by campus fellowships in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. Students join these campus fellowships for several reasons, including the quest for educational success, family liberation, the search for a marital partner, and a place for psychological help, among others. This has caused the campus ministry to boom in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. Furthermore, the implications have been negative. Most students are opening campus fellowships, seeing that many seek spiritual and physical satisfaction. When these students come, they are made to understand that they must give to God in order to receive. Some students give up their school fees

and feeding money to the men of God. Due to the lack of proper sensitization and the absence of a regulatory framework from the university administrators, this exploitative framework has become systemic. These recommendations could serve as a roadmap toward reducing the exploitative tendencies of some campus fellowships in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria.

List of Informants

1. Interview 1: Oral interview with Jude
2. Interview 2: Oral Interview with Esther
3. Interview 3: Oral interview with Hope
4. Interview 4: Oral interview with Faith
5. Interview 5: Oral Interview with Dayo
6. Interview 6: Oral interview with Gift
7. Interview 7: Oral Interview with Philip
8. Interview 8: Oral interview with Joseph
9. Interview 9: Oral interview with Adaobi
10. Interview 10: Oral interview with Agbo
11. Interview 11: Oral interview with Luke
12. Interview 12: Oral interview with Peace
13. Interview 13: Oral interview with Amara